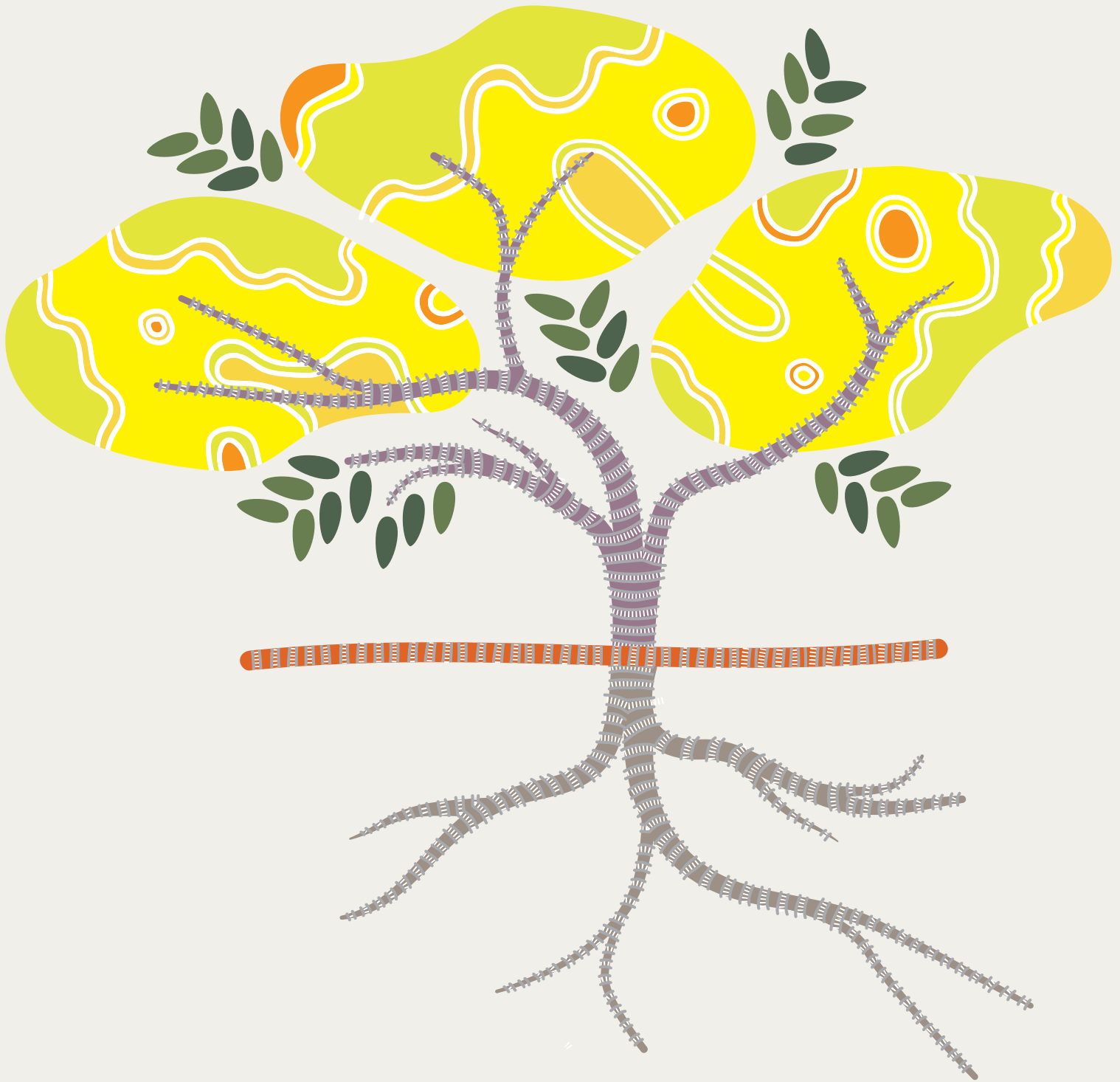
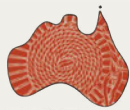


Voices of Country

AUSTRALIA'S ACTION PLAN FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES 2022–2032



Australian Government



**FIRST
LANGUAGES
AUSTRALIA**



INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES
2022–2032



2022–2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
Indigenous Languages

AUTHORS

Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages has been co-authored in partnership between the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group and the Australian Government.

TERMINOLOGY

In *Voices of Country*, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/s' and 'First Nations people/s' refer to all people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. The terms 'community' and 'communities' refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Throughout *Voices of Country*, the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages', 'Australia's first languages', 'language' and 'languages' are used. These terms can be interpreted differently in different contexts. However, in *Voices of Country* they refer to languages and language families of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The term 'community' also means different things to different people. In *Voices of Country* it refers to the group of people who have a shared connection to a particular language. These people may or may not speak this language daily, or learn the language as children. They may live in close proximity or be spread across the globe.

In *Voices of Country*, the term 'strong languages' refers to languages that are used by all age groups, including all children, and that people in all age groups are fluent speakers. The term 'languages in revival' refers to languages that people are learning and speaking, of varying strengths, which do not meet the definition of 'strong languages'. The term 'language vitality' describes the strength of a language.

DESIGN

The Wattle Tree graphic and design for *Voices of Country* was a concept shaped by the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group and created by the design agency Gilimbaa with cultural elements created by David Williams (Wakka Wakka).

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

© First Languages Australia and the Commonwealth of Australia, 2023.

Copyright in this publication is jointly owned by First Languages Australia (FLA) and the Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA), and is protected by the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).

© Artworks and photographs belong to the copyright owners, reproduced with permission.

© Case studies belong to the contributors, reproduced with permission.

© Cover Artwork and graphic design, created by Gilimbaa Pty Ltd, reproduced with permission.

The historic image of Fanny Smith on page 30 is reproduced with permission of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

In accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), you may use, reproduce and adapt the following sections of the publication:

- Foreword from the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Indigenous Australians on page 3,
- Message from Australia's Ambassador for First Nations People on page 4,
- About the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032 (with the exception of the quote) on page 5,
- The Australian Context (with the exception of the quote and the 5th paragraph) on page 6,
- About *Voices of Country* – Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032 (with the exception of the quote and the five themes) on page 7,
- The International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group Partnership (with the exception of the quotes) on page 8 and
- Guidance for Stakeholders (with the exception of the five theme titles) on pages 33 to 36.

You must seek consent to use, reproduce or adapt all other materials from the copyright owners.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY NOTICE

This publication contains Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) belonging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including quotations, narratives, languages, stories, case studies, artworks, symbols, images, and knowledge. Cultural protocols apply. The ICIP has been reproduced with permission from Indigenous peoples and Traditional Custodians. The parties acknowledge and agree that ownership of any ICIP will remain with Indigenous peoples.

The narratives and visions for each theme on pages 9 to 32 were collectively produced by the Directions Group to describe the connection that Indigenous people have to languages. They represent an Indigenous viewpoint and are protected as ICIP.

The case studies were provided by Indigenous contributors and are ICIP.

The quotations from Indigenous people are also recognised as ICIP.

The artworks also contain ICIP.

Cultural permission to use the historical image of Fanny Smith, on page 30 has been granted after consultation with her family and permission from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. Do not reproduce this image without seeking permission from family and community.

Please do not reproduce any ICIP without prior written consent of Indigenous people and Traditional Custodians. This includes:

- The Acknowledgment of Country from the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group,
- The 5th paragraph of the Australian Context section on page 6,
- The themes and visions on page 7 and pages 9 to 32,
- The narrative text in the themes on pages 9 to 32,
- Case studies,
- Language words,
- Reuse of quotations by Indigenous people, and
- Artworks and photographs.

Dealing with any part of the ICIP in this publication for any purpose that has not been authorised by Indigenous contributors and the Traditional Custodians is a serious breach of the customary law and may breach the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). For enquiries about permitted reproduction, users should contact the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) on behalf of First Languages Australia (FLA). FLA and DITRDCA will direct you to seek permission from Indigenous peoples and the relevant Traditional Custodians of the ICIP.

Contact DITRDCA and FLA at IndigenousLanguagesSecretariat@arts.gov.au

Any permitted reproduction must acknowledge the Indigenous contributors and Traditional Custodians.

CREATIVE COMMONS NOTICE



The copyright of this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) with the exception of:

- Third party copyright material;
- ICIP including the narratives, case studies and quotations;
- Artwork and photographs protected by copyright;
- Logos and any material protected by trade mark or otherwise noted in this publication; and
- the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence is a standard form licence agreement that allows you to remix, adapt, and build upon the licenced material for non-commercial purposes provided that you attribute the work to the Commonwealth and First Languages Australia, and license your new creations under the same licence as the original. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode>.

Content contained in this publication should be attributed as:

© First Languages Australia and Commonwealth of Australia 2023,
Voices of Country – Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032.

Acknowledgement of Country



INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES DIRECTIONS GROUP

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group acknowledges Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the unceded sovereign peoples of this continent. We recognise and respect continuing connections to Country – to the lands and waterways, seas and skies – and to our Ancestors.

We respectfully honour our Ancestors who fought and died for Country. We pay tribute to the oldest civilisation in the world who, against the odds, have survived invasion, colonisation, and dispossession.

We acknowledge that self-determination is a human right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. We recognise our right to conserve, use, develop and transmit languages to future generations. Our invisible words... our most precious of all.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

The Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Owners of all the lands and waters on which Australians live and work. We extend our deepest respect to the custodians of languages and stories that date back to the first sunrise on this continent.

We honour the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in sustaining the oldest continuing cultural practices in the world, despite experiencing entrenched disadvantage, political exclusion, intergenerational trauma and ongoing institutional racism.

We acknowledge that self-determination is a human right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. We recognise the right to conserve, use, develop and transmit languages to future generations.

The Australian Government will continue to honour its commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to maintain, revive and celebrate Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures. This is demonstrated by the Australian Government's commitments to Australia's National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the National Cultural Policy Revive – a place for every story, a story for every place.

The Australian Government thanks the Directions Group members who have generously shared their valuable knowledge and expertise to inform the development of this Action Plan.

DIRECTIONS GROUP AND AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

The Directions Group and Australian Government acknowledge and appreciate the ongoing efforts of the many people working in the languages sector across the country.

This publication contains images and references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are deceased. The Australian Government and Directions Group does not wish to cause distress to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.



Contents



| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword from the Directions Group Co-Chairs | 2 |
| Foreword from the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Indigenous Australians | 3 |
| Message from Australia's Ambassador for First Nations People | 4 |
| About the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032 | 5 |
| The Australian Context | 6 |
| About Voices of Country – Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade 2022–2032 | 7 |
| The International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group Partnership | 8 |
| Themes – Voices of Country | 9 |
| Theme One – Stop the Loss | 11 |
| Theme Two – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities are Centre | 15 |
| Theme Three – Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer | 19 |
| Theme Four – Caring for Country | 25 |
| Theme Five – Truth-telling and Celebration | 29 |
| Guidance for Stakeholders | 33 |
| Appendix A – Reference List | 38 |

Foreword from the Directions Group Co-Chairs

For more than 60 years, dedicated community activists have united to advocate for our languages both regionally and nationally. It is because of their tireless efforts over many decades that we have now reached the position that we are in today, where the Australian Government is beginning to recognise our language rights and support the efforts needed to revitalise and strengthen our languages.

Our languages connect us to our lands, cultures and ancestors. The knowledge contained within these languages is invaluable. It is through our languages that we see and describe the world around us. For more than 235 years, our languages have faced numerous policies and systemic abuse aimed at eradicating them, our cultures and our peoples. Our languages endure because of the many brave people who have fought to keep them alive, often at great risk to themselves and their families.

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages draws attention to the critical loss of language, the importance of language and the urgent need to revitalise and strengthen Indigenous languages. In Australia, this means a unique opportunity to work in partnership with our governments on policies that directly affect our languages, their strength and use.

The Directions Group, in partnership with the Australian Government, developed this Action Plan in response to UNESCO's Global Call for Action titled *Voices of Country* – Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032. We wholeheartedly

thank each of the members of the Directions Group for entrusting us with their cultural knowledge and expertise throughout this process. We also thank our government partners for embracing a new way of working together.

This Action Plan has the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities at its heart. It is a tool that governments and other stakeholders can use to join with our communities in taking the significant and necessary steps required to see our languages flourishing and strong.

Now is the time to prioritise our languages for the future – for wellbeing, for social impact and for restorative justice. We look forward to continuing to work with the Australian Government and language communities nationally to implement this Action Plan.



**Mr Beau Williams
(Murrawarri)**
First Languages Australia
August 2023



**Ms Annalee Little
(Wakka Wakka)**
First Languages Australia
August 2023

Foreword from the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Indigenous Australians

It is a great privilege, unique to Australians, to exist with and alongside millennia of knowledge belonging to the oldest continuing cultures in the world. The hundreds of languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the continent are central to this rich cultural heritage – and something we should all celebrate. They are intertwined with Country and identity, and help to keep our communities strong. Our commitment to Voices of Country recognises the important role of languages in telling stories, maintaining and sharing culture, and caring for lands and waters.

Culture and language help improve the physical and mental wellbeing of First Nations people. These are the cornerstone of meaningful progress against Australia's Closing the Gap targets. Government has a role to play across all of our portfolio areas, such as health, social services, justice and the arts. Realising the benefits of languages not only improves social and economic outcomes, but it enriches all aspects of our lives, from what we learn, the books we read, the music we listen to, and the media we consume. Language tells the stories of our country – it helps us understand ourselves, each other, and shapes how the world understands us.

Voices of Country builds on what we have achieved through the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy Revive – a place for every story, a story for every place. In this work the Albanese Labor Government recognises the importance of First Nations languages and cultures.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Directions Group for their invaluable work in developing Voices of Country in partnership with the Australian Government. We extend this thanks to our friends and partners at First Languages Australia, whose dedication and leadership has been outstanding.



The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
August 2023



The Hon Linda Burney MP (Wiradjuri)
Minister for Indigenous Australians
August 2023

Message from Australia's Ambassador for First Nations People

Language holds immense significance for me, as it is through language that First Nations people weave together the intricate tapestry of identities and unlock the invaluable treasures of Indigenous cultural heritage. It exerts a profound influence, shaping our understanding of the world that resonates with the very essence of our being.

When we take a global perspective on the diversity of indigenous languages, we come to appreciate both their beauty and the critical losses that indigenous groups have faced in their respective countries. Each indigenous language holds a unique narrative, a distinct worldview, and a vast wealth of knowledge. The conservation and revitalisation of these languages are of paramount importance, as they are inherently intertwined with culture, identity, and the social and emotional well-being of indigenous peoples. This message reverberates strongly among First Nations people and communities worldwide, as I heard during the recent United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

I acknowledge the remarkable efforts of UNESCO, the Global Task Force and the contributions of Mr Craig Ritchie (Dhunghutti and Biripi) and Ms Karina Lester (Yankunytjatjara). Their unwavering dedication and exceptional leadership during the Year of Indigenous Languages and the ongoing Decade initiative have played a pivotal role in paving the way for progress. I also extend a sincere acknowledgment to the Directions Group members. Your steadfast commitment and generous contributions of cultural knowledge to Voices of Country is absolutely critical to ensuring that we can change the tide.

Together, let us embrace the notion that the opportunities for languages are boundless. First Nations people possess the power to influence, develop, and implement language initiatives in every nation throughout this journey.

Let us stand united in our commitment to the conservation and revitalisation of indigenous languages, knowing that through our collective efforts, we can create a world that values and celebrates the diversity of all cultures and languages.



**Mr Justin Mohamed
(Goreng Goreng)**
Australia's Ambassador
for First Nations People
August 2023

ABOUT

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages
'Leaving no one behind, no one outside' – by 2032



Many indigenous languages around the world are in a critical state. The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed the period 2022 to 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to draw global attention to these languages and to mobilise action for their preservation, revitalisation and promotion.

The International Decade is a key outcome of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is leading global efforts for the International Decade and has established a Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages, to ensure equitable participation of all stakeholders.

Australia is a member of the Global Task Force as one of three UNESCO Member States from the Asia and Pacific region. First Languages Australia, Australia's peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, is also a member of the Global Task Force as one of three Indigenous Peoples Organisations representing the Pacific region.

The Global Task Force provides guidance on the preparation, planning, implementation and monitoring of activities, in line with the objectives of the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032 (UNESCO 2021). The Global Action Plan provides a strategic framework for joint and coordinated action for the International Decade.

“There is no value given to the treasures of our languages which hold our knowledge of everything.”

Denise Smith-Ali (Noongar), Directions Group member

The Australian Context

“Our languages are the voice of the land, and we are the custodians and carriers of the language. It is our responsibility to care for the language, culture and the land and to protect them for future generations.”

Jeanie Bell (Jagera and Butchulla/Dulingbara), *Community Linguist* (Bell 1994: iv)



All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are in a critical and precarious state. Across the continent, there is an extraordinary diversity of language contexts and ecologies with some being the first languages that children learn, some sleeping, and many being reawakened by their community custodians. *Gambay – First Languages Map* (FLA 2023) highlights more than 800 languages, reflecting the names and groupings favoured by communities.¹

Colonisation and colonial policies led to the forced displacement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, disconnecting them from the lands and waters with which their languages and ways of being are inextricably linked (National Archives of Australia n.d.). Subsequent government policies systematically suppressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples speaking their languages (Reconciliation Australia 2019).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country report varying experiences in terms of language loss. Many communities, including those subjected to the first waves of colonisation, experienced a complete severance of language. Other communities have been able to maintain some fluent speakers and intergenerational transmission, even though these languages are in a perilous state.

The experience of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are spoken is different across the country. In some parts of the country, people speak traditional languages in all aspects of their lives. In other areas, it may only be Elders who speak traditional languages on a regular basis. In yet other places, there may be no fluent speakers, and perhaps only a few words or phrases have been revived (DITRDC 2020).

It is a fundamental human right to speak your own language. It is through language that we communicate with the world, express our history and culture, learn, defend our human rights, and participate in all aspects of society. Languages are connection to Country, cultures and kinships and carry Creation stories, songlines and knowledge from generation to generation. Languages are also a cultural determinant of health. They are integral in affirming and maintaining the identity, wellbeing, vitality, autonomy and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Many languages around the country are being reawakened, demonstrating what might be possible for many more languages, with appropriate support and investment. Other languages still require work to restore or to strengthen intergenerational transmission. Without support and coordinated action by all stakeholders, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages will not be spoken past the end of the International Decade.

1. *Gambay – First Languages Map* (FLA 2023), developed by First Languages Australia, is an interactive map of languages and language families that reflects the names and groupings favoured by community.

ABOUT

Voices of Country – Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade 2022–2032

“The International Decade of Indigenous Languages is creating opportunities to highlight the value of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The Directions Group are leveraging the international momentum to effect significant change that will strengthen our languages.”

Annalee Little (Wakka Wakka), Directions Group Co-Chair

Guided by the Global Action Plan, *Voices of Country* – Australia’s Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032, provides a framework to guide Australia’s participation in the International Decade. *Voices of Country* is a call to action for all stakeholders.

Voices of Country is guided by the Australian Government’s National Cultural Policy Revive – a place for every story, a story for every place, which recognises and respects the critical place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories at the centre of Australia’s arts and culture (DITRDCA 2023). Revive is structured around five pillars but places First Nations first. It recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture must be community-led, and aims to advance agency, and financial and creative control.

Voices of Country is also a priority action for the Australian Government under Target 16 of Australia’s National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The target is – by 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.

Voices of Country is framed through five inter-connected themes:

1. Stop the Loss
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities are Centre
3. Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer
4. Caring for Country, and
5. Truth-telling and Celebration.

These themes articulate Australia’s high-level strategic focus for the International Decade. The five themes are represented as a native wattle tree.

Each theme is supported by an aspirational vision. The Directions Group has developed the themes and visions. Combined, they represent the priority areas through which Australia will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build the foundations for realising their aspirations for their languages.

Each theme includes case studies that were chosen by the Directions Group. These real-world examples demonstrate how the objectives of each theme might be realised. We thank the organisations and communities showcased in the case studies for their generosity in sharing their stories.

The guidance for stakeholders section provides community-led guidance, for a wide range of stakeholders, on the types of activities that the Directions Group and the Australian Government consider will have the most impact in stopping the loss of language; in placing communities at the centre of this; in establishing and supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer; in caring for Country; and in supporting languages and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through truth-telling and celebration.

Consistent with the Global Action Plan, the Australian Government will undertake and report on practical commitments that deliver progress against the framework set out in *Voices of Country*. The Australian Government will report against these commitments on an annual basis.

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group Partnership

“What we are planning to do with this group here, from my heart, we will be doing this for us. We won’t be promoting anyone. We’ll be doing this for us, and we won’t be doing this for someone else.”

Gawura Wanambi (Yolngu), Directions Group member

Australia’s National Agreement on Closing the Gap identifies four priority reform areas that will change the way that governments work to accelerate improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Priority Reform One – *Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making* is a critical step in ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a strong voice in the development and design of the policies and programs that directly affect their lives.

To give tangible effect to this priority reform, the Australian Government established the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group to shape Australia’s participation in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032.

The Directions Group was formed through an Expression of Interest process that received fifty-eight applications, which were assessed by a panel that included the Australian Government, the Coalition of Peaks and First Languages Australia. The Directions Group comprises eighteen members: thirteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, including two members representing First Languages Australia; and five ex-officio members from key Australian Government agencies (the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Education and the National Indigenous Australians Agency).

The partnership between the Directions Group and the Australian Government is built on the principles of mutual respect, cultural safety, transparency and accountability. In practice, this means valuing the expertise and contribution of every member, and creating a safe space for an open and honest dialogue. The partnership also recognises the importance of joint accountability for outcomes, and ensuring the transparency and accessibility of information.

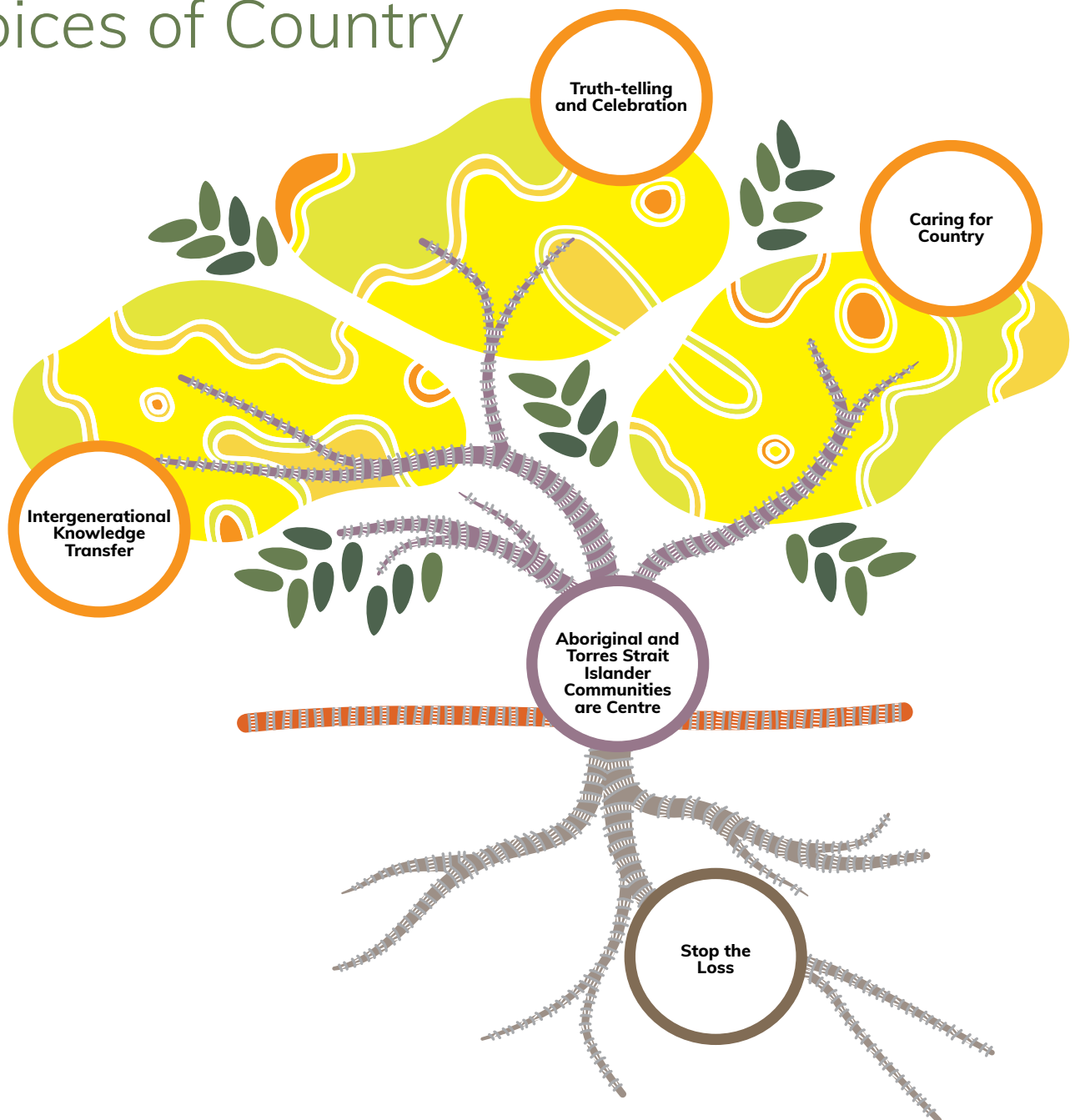
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Directions Group provide a national perspective and an independent voice that is central to this Action Plan.

“Our partners are experts on language policy. We are experts in government processes and are responsible for ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are at the forefront of advice provided to Government decision-makers.”

Pauline Halchuk, ex-officio member of the Directions Group

THEMES

Voices of Country



“The native tree should incorporate the feeling of how we look after and protect our trees on our country, which is part of the journey. This captures the importance of its value through stories being handed and passed down through generations.”

Joyce Bonner (Butchulla), Directions Group member

Voices of Country – Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032 is guided by five inter-connected themes, represented as a native wattle tree, itself a source of food, medicine and tools, with language, culture and traditional knowledges as its foundation.

The Wattle Tree graphic was created by design agency Gilimbaa with cultural elements created by David Williams (Wakka Wakka).



THEME ONE

Stop the Loss

Australia's vision for theme one:
Securing the future and continuance of Australia's first languages.



“This upcoming Decade, we need proper action. Our languages are important. You can’t have art, song, dance. You can’t have storytelling. Our culture survives through our languages, the invisible, the intangible. What we can’t touch, and see, is actually the most important of all.”

Daryn McKenny (Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri),
Directions Group member

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are the first and original languages of Australia.

Australia has one of the highest rates of language loss in the world. Immediate action is required to stop the loss, and to ensure the safety and security of Australia's first languages. All of these languages are at risk. Even our remaining strong languages are under threat. To recognise the full functions of the languages sector, increased and secure investment is required.

Turning the tide on language loss will require systemic change that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and supported by all of Australia. This includes government at all levels, academia, and the not-for-profit and private sectors.

Languages need continuing oral transmission. There must be a place for every language, with actions tailored to the needs of each and every community. Strong languages need support. Languages in revival need support. All languages need to move forward, without leaving any behind.

Stopping the loss requires immediate action. Taking this action and turning the tide on language loss will allow languages and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to once again flourish.

CASE STUDY

Supporting languages through legislation in New South Wales

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Aboriginal Languages Trust (New South Wales) for providing this case study.

Globally there are only a handful of countries that currently legislate for indigenous languages, including Canada and New Zealand. At the time of this Action Plan's launch, the state of New South Wales is the only jurisdiction in Australia with legislation to protect and strengthen Indigenous languages. The NSW *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* became law on 24 October 2017 and commenced on 5 March 2020, following extensive consultation across the state to gain feedback on a proposed bill for Aboriginal languages legislation.

The *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* has three parts:

- A preamble which acknowledges the importance of Aboriginal languages and the importance of reawakening, nurturing and growing Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal custodianship of languages.
- Establishment of an Aboriginal Languages Trust to resource local language activities (amongst other functions).
- A five year Strategic Plan to guide investment and activities in language revival in NSW.

The Aboriginal Languages Trust is managed by a Board of nine Aboriginal people with a diverse array of skillsets, experience and representation from different language groups across New South Wales. The Trust was established to provide a focused, coordinated and sustained approach to Aboriginal language activities at local, regional and state levels. Consultation with over 400 stakeholders informed the values, goals and focus areas outlined in the Trust's *Strategic Plan 2022-2027*.

While it is early days to see outcomes of the Trust and its Strategic Plan, success can be seen in the rapid growth in grants distributed to the Aboriginal Community, increased attendance at Aboriginal language conferences and growth in specialist expertise within the agency. From a figure just under \$300,000 in grants in the 2019-20 financial year, the Trust has now allocated \$3.9 million in grants to Aboriginal Communities for the 2022-23 financial year. In 2022, 230 people attended the Aboriginal Language Gathering over 2.5 days, a significant increase on the previous 160 people in 2019.



CASE STUDY

Stopping the Loss in Victoria – the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages for sharing this story.

Our Elders and community members fought hard to make places and spaces for languages in Victoria. It all started 30 years ago when one of the founding members paid \$50 out of his own pocket to register the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. Today, the Centre is the peak body for languages in Victoria, underpinned by the notion of Language is Culture; Culture is Language, and the principles of sovereignty and self-determination.

Colonisation devastated our complex language systems with acts of genocide, massacres and removal from our cultural practices and ways of life. The Centre is tasked with revitalising over 44 languages that once thrived for thousands of years. Today, all of our languages are deemed at high risk and most are going through the process of revitalisation.

The Centre has worked tirelessly to develop resources and programs to support communities revitalising their languages. We have worked with other peaks, governments and organisations to develop fee-for-service guidelines and language qualifications. We continue to advocate for systemic changes to stop the loss of languages. We hold the largest collection of contemporary materials on Victorian Aboriginal languages in existence. The Centre is now focussed on protecting this collection.

Our story has come with challenges and setbacks, including funding cuts that severely impacted our capacity to support communities in their language work. Through these times our dedicated board and senior management continued to persevere with little to no wages. It is the legacy of our good, honest and strong Elders who made a life commitment that has carried us through these difficult times. It is their tenacity, resilience and sacrifice which has kept our languages alive.

“Language expresses our religion and spiritual life... the People and Land belong together, as does Language and Land, it is integral to linking past, present and future... for all Australians.”

Ivan Couzens (Keerray Wooroong Gunditjmara), Elder and Language Knowledge holder (dec.)



Ethan Bundle-Bell (Butchulla-Keerray Wooroong), interviewing Uncle Larry Walsh (Taungurung), at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages Language Camp 2021. Photographed by Sophie Lewincamp, courtesy of the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages.



Photograph taken by Daryn McKenny (Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri) on Awabakal Country.

THEME TWO

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities are Centre

Australia's vision for theme two:

Over the Decade our voices, and those of our Elders, will ensure that community leadership and priorities are at the centre. Our voices will come through – everything we do will be by community, for community. This will give us stronger and safer communities.



Language comes from Country and people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their leadership, priorities, cultural protocols and voices must be at the heart of all language activity – led by community, for community.

Community-led actions will be influenced by language vitality. Communities must be supported to take the action that they determine as the best way forward to ensure their languages flourish.

In recent years there has been a groundswell of acknowledgement and interest in Australia's first languages. This has resulted in an exponential increase in the demand for language services.

Partnerships must be led by community and embody the principle of 'nothing about us without us'. Partnerships must be built on mutual respect, support the wishes of community and ensure that community voices are heard first and foremost. Partners are required to actively engage with their local communities and support self-determination, as all decisions on language activity are for community to make.

“Language is the centre of the universe and our whole world.”

Vicki Couzens (Keerray Wooroong Gunditjmarra),
Directions Group member

CASE STUDY

Community-led language outcomes – the Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre for sharing this story.

Language centres and other community language groups and people are the bedrock of language activity across the country. Languages live intangibly in the bloodlines of people working on languages. The unbroken, inherent connection felt between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their language transcends traditional concepts of language reconstruction.

Reawakening languages is only possible when community is at the centre. One of the many community-led organisations at the centre of their language is the Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre.

Broome is home of the Yawuru language. The journey to revitalise the Yawuru language began with the passion of an Elder wanting to ensure another language did not disappear, and a dream that the children would one day hear and speak the Yawuru language.

The Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre has a vision for Broome to become a bilingual town. The Centre's language programs and resources support the development of teachers, teaching and immersion in Yawuru language in all Broome schools. With Yawuru native title recognition in 2006 and the establishment of the first language team in 2011, the revitalisation of the Yawuru language has grown. Approximately 1,500 children in Broome now have access to Yawuru language classes, compared to only a handful at program commencement. However, with the scope and goals of work to be achieved, the language remains in a revitalisation stage at present.

Recently, the Centre received a grant from the Australian Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program, to support the implementation of an early childhood education pilot. Receiving this grant will allow the Centre to build a framework and program to support the learning of Yawuru language from birth, through to later years. The pilot will embed existing Yawuru language programs into a range of early childhood settings. It will also expand the opportunities for people within the Yawuru community to access Yawuru language and transfer this opportunity into their homes.



Wanggaralangga Ngan-ga (They Will Know Language). Pictured left to right: Chey Ross, Madelyn Bin Swani and Eli Ranger. Photographed by Rebecca Ross, courtesy of Nyamba Buru Yawuru.

CASE STUDY

Revitalising language and culture through song – the Djinama Yilaga Choir

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Djinama Yilaga Choir for sharing this story.

“Being in the choir connects me with my identity as a young Djiringanj woman, it gives me confidence because I know my community is strong in culture.”

Requia Campbell (Djiringanj), Djinama Yilaga Choir member

The Djinama Yilaga (to make happy) Choir is led by the Creative Director of the Choir, Cheryl Davison (Walbunja/Ngarigo). It is a grassroots community initiative on the South Coast of New South Wales, created by local people who are passionate about reclaiming language. Language activist and singer songwriter, Dr Lou Bennett AM (Yorta Yorta Dja Dja Wurrung) has been instrumental in partnering with the community since it began, using her ‘Sovereign Language Rematriation through Song Pedagogy’. Dr Bennett’s pedagogy explores how cultural practices of song-making, yarning and singing can create language activities for communities.

Since 2019, the Choir has performed at local, national and international events, including the Canberra International Music Festival held at Old Parliament House and performing in Poland as part of a cultural exchange between the Polish and Ngarigo.

Language songwriting workshops facilitated by Dr Bennett have been offered to community to engage more people with learning the Dhurga language. Members of the Choir have gained meaningful employment, developed a greater sense of wellbeing and connection to culture, land and country by connecting with language. Dr Bennett and the Choir use knowledge passed down orally through the generations and the ‘Dhurga Dictionary and Learner’s Grammar – A South Coast, NSW Aboriginal Language’ compiled by South Coast Elders, Miss Patricia Ellis, Waiane Donovan and Kerry Boyenga to inform their songwriting.

“We are not a deficit, we are a resource and what we have to offer to the world is so important. We know where we come from and we know our values. It’s not just about speaking and singing in language it’s identifying we have value, we feel it and we know it, and hold onto it – that’s the big part of that journey, it’s not language waking up it’s us finding that cultural connection and awakening our inner spirit as knowledge holders.”²

Dr Lou Bennett, AM (Yorta Yorta Dja Dja Wurrung)

2. Interview with Dr Lou Bennett conducted by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts on 1 April 2023.



Photograph taken by Daryn McKenny (Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri) off the coast of Jerrinja Country.

THEME THREE

Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Australia's vision for theme three:

Restore intergenerational traditional language and cultural transmission.



“It’s not just about language. It’s about teaching our kids to be cultural beings, starting with language.”

Clayton Cruse (Adnyamathanha and Antikirinya Martu Yankunytjatjara), Directions Group member

A flourishing language is part of everyday life – spoken across generations, from children to great-grandparents, and across all aspects of life – at home, in the community, on Country, at school and in the workplace.

Today’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth will become the custodians of Australia’s first languages and cultures for future generations. Communities will have different pathways for passing their living knowledges from Elders to community members. The pathway chosen by a community – sharing knowledge across generations and to those at all stages in their language learning – must be respected and supported.

Supporting and enhancing existing intergenerational language transmission will allow strong languages to continue into the future. For the many other languages that communities are working hard to revive, establishing transmission across generations is key to their future.

Conserving and restoring intergenerational knowledge transfer will require systemic change and a holistic approach to language learning – an approach that supports education and learning opportunities for all, and provides career pathways and sustainable and viable employment opportunities. This includes embedding languages across a wide range of sectors, from education and tourism, to science, health, land management and beyond.

CASE STUDY

Language revival across generations – the Pertame School

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Pertame School for sharing this story.

The Pertame School is a community-led language revival program growing the next generation of fluent speakers to reinstate our language as the living, breathing voice of our community once again. Pertame is a severely endangered language, with 20 fluent speakers remaining within the older generations. Transmitting the whole body of our Elders' knowledge to the next generations is critical to our language's survival. In 2020, we launched a Master-Apprentice Program, a method of language revival developed by First Nations communities in California that pairs a fluent Elder (the master) with adult learners (apprentices) to rapidly create new fluent speakers of endangered First Nations languages.

Our master Elder and five adult apprentices spend 10-20 hours a week together intensively, in complete oral language immersion. English is left at the door, because our First Nations languages are so much more sacred than just a mere English translation. We wanted to teach Pertame in Pertame, using our original methods of intergenerational knowledge transmission: breath-to-breath language immersion from Elders to youth.

After three years of developing our apprentices through the Program, we are now trialling the Pertame Ngetya Untya (Language Nest). This is a complete First Nations language immersion playgroup for birth to five-year-olds and their carers. For five days a week, our Pertame babies will be completely immersed in their language, culture and community, to naturally acquire Pertame as their first language.

The Language Nest is led by our apprentices, guided by our Elders and supported by our babies' parents and grandparents. Our babies must speak their first language first, for Pertame to be considered a safe language once again. The research tells us that for a child to be fluent in Pertame, they must be immersed until seven to eight years of age. In the future, the Pertame School will need to pave the way forward, so our children can complete an education up to at least Year 3 in Pertame immersion. The continued future of Pertame depends on it.



Pertame Elders and educators from the country just south of Alice Springs share language with young children as part of the Pertame School Language Nest. Photographed by Vanessa Farrelly, courtesy of the Pertame School.

CASE STUDY

Community-led programs in schools – the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School for sharing this story.

Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School is the first and only bilingual school of an Aboriginal language (Gumbaynggirr) in NSW. Our model for classroom teaching includes an all-Aboriginal teaching staff. We also have community facilitators and cultural experts working with our junuybin (children) on a daily basis.

Currently, we are registered as 'bilingual', however, we continue to work with Government to adapt regulations that support our 'immersion' curriculum. In the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, we stress the importance of our community exercising our sovereignty and right to educate our children in the way in which we know is essential to their growth and wellbeing.

The school's point of difference is that we are unapologetic about language and culture – our junuybin and staff are immersed every day in our school values of 'Wajaarr, Guunu-warluuny, Miindal-la' (Country, Culture, Wisdom), and all that is taught and learned has a foundation of Ngarraanga; which has multiple meanings, including respect, learning, thinking and listening. A major component of the school's teaching and learning is our Wajaada (On-Country) curriculum – all students spend a full day on-Country, learning from cultural experts and Elders, and receiving Gumbaynggirr language instruction in all key learning areas.

We are already surpassing expectations for Aboriginal students, with all students currently achieving above stage

outcomes in all key learning areas. Our attendance rate is over 95%, well over state averages. Our school philosophy concerns the whole child and our community measurement of success varies from the western lens. The school is excelling in education, and is demonstrating this approach works for our junuybin.




Gumbaynggirr Daari Giibarr ngayinggi dulbuy waagay juum (Gumbaynggirr Strong boy sits next to fire smoke). Photographed by Amber Hamer, Wayila Creative, courtesy of Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School.

CASE STUDY

Bilingual Education

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank Directions Group member Clayton Cruse (Adnyamathanha and Antikirinya Martu Yankunytjatjara) for providing this case study.



Bilingual education refers to an approach to teaching where both the students' native language and a second language are used as mediums of instruction. In the context of Australia's Aboriginal communities, bilingual education aims to provide instruction in both Standard Australian English and the local Aboriginal language.

Bilingual education in Aboriginal communities has been used as a way to preserve and promote languages and culture while also helping students to become proficient in English. Bilingual programs typically involve teaching subjects like math, science, and social studies in the local Aboriginal language, while also providing English language instruction.

In the 1970s, the bilingual education movement in Australia gained momentum as a response to reverse the damage of assimilation policies that aimed to eradicate languages and cultures. The original goal of bilingual education was to support Aboriginal children in maintaining their cultural heritage and identity while also providing them with the necessary language skills to succeed in the wider society.

In recent years, there has been a shift towards English-only instruction in many Aboriginal communities, with some schools discontinuing bilingual programs. Australia's first languages continue to be endangered. Bilingual education remains an important part of language preservation. Efforts to preserve and promote languages through bilingual education and other initiatives remains crucial to the maintenance of Aboriginal culture and identity.

“Bilingual education remains the best-case scenario for Aboriginal students to learn English, at the same time as learning in and maintaining their mother tongue languages. This is supported by Aboriginal people around the country (where possible, and often in the face of perpetual adversity) as well as non-Indigenous linguists and academics.”

Clayton Cruse (Adnyamathanha and Antikirinya Martu Yankunytjatjara), Directions Group member



Photograph taken by Daryn McKenny (Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri) on Yawuru Country.



Photograph taken by Daryn McKenny (Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri) on Yawuru Country.

THEME FOUR

Caring for Country

Australia's vision for theme four:

Everyone has the opportunity to practise their language and culture on Country.



For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, language, culture and Country are intertwined and inseparable. Language is connection to Country, homelands, bloodlines, family and community. The removal of people from Country has broken these connections.

Languages provide a pathway to access and transmit traditional ecological knowledges and the deep understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have of the Lands, Seas and Skies to current and future generations.

Language on Country strengthens the connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the lands, songlines and its stories. Language on Country enhances the expression of language through ceremony, song, stories, dance and art, which are essential to wellbeing, identity and a sense of belonging.

Language on Country is also about borderlines and access – how languages sit within and across communities and borders, and supporting those that live off-Country to access language.

The International Decade provides an opportunity to highlight the value, beauty and importance of Australia's first languages and their essential role in Lore/Law and Caring for Country. Caring for our Lands, Seas and Skies requires reciprocity – maintaining balance for our flora and fauna, and giving back to Country, including in times of flood, drought and bushfires.

“Language on Country is vital for the health and wellbeing of community. It connects young people to their identity and restores the spirit of our Elders.”

Desmond Crump (Gamilaroi), Directions Group member

“Climate change is an issue that goes to the heart of caring for Country, we need to look after mother earth. From this perspective, language holds knowledge about preventing natural disasters like bushfires, droughts and taking care of our flora and fauna, lakes, rivers, oceans, creeks, mountains and skylines.”

Joyce Bonner (Butchulla), Directions Group member

“Country is where language comes from.”

Shania Armstrong (Pertame), Directions Group member

CASE STUDY

Learning in both worlds – Bush University

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank Mongunu Gumbula (Yolngu) and Mercy Djungmali (Alawa) from the Regional Study Hub for sharing this story.



The Regional Study Hub, known as the bush university, in southeast Arnhem Land is educating local remote Aboriginal leaders for tomorrow by creating educational pathways through university, while remaining and learning on Country.

Learning takes place by exchanging both knowledges and skills between Yolngu education and non-Indigenous education. Many of the Yolngu people attending speak English as a fourth or fifth language. The model of participating in a bush environment allows for local language speakers and people from all across Arnhem Land to build university foundations in a way that is relevant to community.

Throughout the duration of the program, there are separate times for traditional methods of learning and teaching and western methods of learning and teaching. The exchange principles allow students to see and feel the difference in learning in different places, like having to go out from the bush to the city. These sorts of experiences help to develop their learning capacities and be strong in both worlds.

“Allowing them to go to university gives them different environments and learning spaces by meeting new challenges and opportunities. It builds their self-esteem and personal satisfaction to be able to learn both ways.”³

Mongunu Gumbula (Yolngu) and
Mercy Djungmali (Alawa), Regional Study Hub

3. Interview by Yasunori Hayashi conducted on 27 April 2023 with Mongunu Gumbula (Yolngu) and Mercy Djungmali (Alawa).

CASE STUDY

Caring for the voices of Country – the Malu Kiai (Boigu) Rangers

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Torres Strait Regional Authority for sharing this story.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have cared for Country for thousands of years. The Australian Government's Indigenous Rangers Program ensures local people can protect and care for Country using the old ways and methods passed on through generations. One of the ranger groups supported by this Program are the Malu Kiai rangers from the Torres Strait Islands.

Since bepor taim (before time), the people of Boigu Island – Malu Kiai – have cared for their land and sea country. These are the teachings of Ailan Kastom (island custom). Traditional ecological knowledge has been passed down from Elders through the Kalaw Kawaw Ya Language, describing every intricate corner of Boigu and its surrounding seas. Today, the Malu Kiai rangers assist community to record and preserve this knowledge using modern technologies. This safeguards traditional knowledge for future generations.

The cultural site mapping project came from the ground up with Malu Kiai rangers recognising the need to communicate place names to the younger generations on the island. Senior Ranger Nelson Gibuma, who is a community Elder and fluent speaker of Kalaw Kawaw Ya, began recording place names across the island with the assistance of his fellow rangers. During several days of collaborative workshops, the rangers scanned high-resolution aerial imagery to pin-point nearly 300 cultural sites across land and sea.

The highly accurate dataset and subsequent maps have been transferred into the community's traditional ecological knowledge database so that future generations can continue to explore these parts of their heritage. The dataset will also serve as a functional tool in the rangers' daily operations, allowing them to communicate their whereabouts more accurately amongst themselves and to the community.

“Historically the names of the places on and around Boigu were passed down verbally. In the 1960s, a map of Boigu was made but information on it was limited. Now we have a detailed map with the names of all of the places. This map is so that the people of Boigu, especially our children, can learn the names and pass them on to their children.”

Nelson Gibuma (Kalaw Kawaw Ya), Malu Kiai Elder and Senior Ranger



Nelson Gibuma (Kalaw Kawaw Ya) assesses an Environmental Monitoring site on Boigu Island. Photographed by David Fell, courtesy of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.



Photograph taken by Jessica Sabatino on Kaurareg Country, courtesy of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

THEME FIVE

Truth-telling and Celebration

Australia's vision for theme five:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples speak their language with integrity and pride. Wider Australia shares this pride, respecting and celebrating Australia's first languages and all that they encompass.

“First Nations languages – ancient, evolving, awoken, sleeping, creole, or whatever form they are in, carry a truth of belonging, a truth of history and a truth of country that spans time and generations and has the potential to be embraced and celebrated by all.”

Jillian Mundy (palawa), Directions Group member

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are some of the most endangered languages in the world. Colonial policies deliberately broke the connection to language and therefore, cultural and spiritual knowledges and identity. The impact of past policies is still felt today.

Truth-telling and historical acceptance is key to reconciliation in Australia. Historical acceptance means that all Australians recognise, understand, and accept the wrongs of the past and the impact of these wrongs on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, still felt today.

The International Decade provides an opportunity to deepen reconciliation, strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people, for the benefit of all Australians.

This opportunity is for everyone – to understand the wrongs of the past, and to celebrate the value, beauty and importance of Australia's first languages. It provides a platform for Australians to better understand our nation's history and how this has led to such significant language loss. It is an opportunity to learn about, and to acknowledge the many challenges that communities have faced, and continue to face, as they work against the clock to save their languages.

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to celebrate and practise culture and speak their languages with integrity and pride in everyday life – at home, in the community, at school, at work and on Country – and for this right to be respected by all Australians.

“Arts and culture play a significant role in maintaining our languages. Expression of culture and language – through music, literature, visual arts, theatre, multi-media and dance – is at the core of our lifestyle. It's embedded in our culture and defines who we are today.”

Leitha Assan (Badhu ipikaz), Directions Group member

CASE STUDY

The impact of the past and stories that shape the present – Fanny Smith and Tanganutara

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for sharing this story.

“I often wonder what would have been going through Grandmother Fanny’s mind when she made those precious recordings, I think of it as a message into a future she would never know. I think there is a message in that for all people with endangered and threatened languages.”

Jillian Mundy (palawa), descendant of Fanny Smith and Directions Group Member

Tanganutara was born on her ancestral lands in about 1806. She lived her early life thriving on the abundance provided by her lands and waters. As a child she was abducted by sealers to be sold into slavery and later held captive by the colonial authorities on Flinders Island. Tanganutara continued to practise her culture and speak her languages despite orders to the contrary by the authorities; and often endured harsh punishment for doing so.

In December 1834, Tanganutara gave birth to a girl who was given the name Fanny Cochrane by the colonial authorities. From her early childhood, Fanny was removed from Tanganutara and forced to live in harsh conditions, frequently punished and abused. Against all odds, she learned the ways of her people and her mother tongue.

Fanny survived her early incarceration and went on to marry William Smith, and thereby ceased to be a ward of the State. She was now Mrs Fanny Smith. In 1858, the first of Fanny’s eleven children was born and from this time on she was able to share her knowledge, customs and language again. Much of this knowledge was still remembered in her children’s families well into the twentieth century.

One word – lakri/tree fern – was documented in use for 160 years both in Fanny’s family and the Aboriginal families who had survived separately on the Furneaux islands; the first written record of it had been made from Tanganutara. This is one of many links – from Tanganutara to Fanny to their families today, that have meant the customs and

beliefs of her people, including words, full sentences, and song fragments of the original languages, were passed on through time and generations.

A few years before her death Fanny was recorded speaking and singing on wax cylinder recordings. These were the only recordings ever made of a Tasmanian Aboriginal language by a native speaker and are now listed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre has undertaken meticulous research over thirty years to rebuild one spoken language from the scarce records of the original languages of lutruwita. *palawa kani*, the language of Tasmanian Aborigines, is now in widespread use amongst the palawa in all areas of cultural and community life and has been learnt by three generations of children.



Fanny Smith recording on Wax Cylinders at Sandy Bay. Photograph courtesy of Sculthorpe Family Archive. Reproduced with the permission of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

CASE STUDY

Supporting communities in everyday life and in difficult times – Aboriginal Interpreting Western Australia

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank Carmel (Walmajarri) from Aboriginal Interpreting Western Australia (AIWA) for sharing this story.

My name is Carmel (Walmajarri). I work as an interpreter with Aboriginal Interpreting Western Australia (AIWA) and help with Walmajarri language at Bayulu Remote Community School in Fitzroy Crossing.

I love interpreting and I love helping the community. I interpreted in Derby during the floods when lots of my family and community lost everything. I helped them to understand how to get help from Centrelink.

My mob was happy to see me in the Centrelink office. They said it's so good you're here, because we couldn't understand what this all means. The old people felt better with me there.

Even though I was affected by the floods, I wanted to stay in Derby and work to help my community. They kept asking in Walmajarri "When we gonna go back? We gotta go back or we gotta stay?" I told them they gotta stay. It was a hard time for us, but interpreting made me feel good.

I grew up seeing my family work as interpreters as far as I can remember, and I wanted to be like them. I did the Diploma of Interpreting with AIWA at TAFE and know the interpreter code of ethics, and rules of interpreting. I chose to be an interpreter so I can help my family and community.

Language is really important to me. My old people taught me Walmajarri language and now I'm teaching the kids. I tell them if you learn your language you can become an interpreter. You can talk for your grandparents. Language connects me to the old people who have left us, and to the youngsters in school.

I have so many favourite memories of interpreting. In the hospital at Fitzroy, at the arts centre and in the old people's home.

They are my best interpreting moments. And I can now add the floods in Derby to my list.



Carmel (Walmajarri) working as an interpreter. Photographed by A.Kogolo, courtesy of Aboriginal Interpreting Western Australia (AIWA).

CASE STUDY

Bringing people together to celebrate languages – the PULiIMA Indigenous Language and Technology Conference

The Directions Group and Australian Government would like to thank the Miromaa Aboriginal Language & Technology Centre for sharing this story.

The PULiIMA Indigenous Language and Technology Conference is a biennial event aimed at bringing people together to share pioneering project ideas and exciting products and equipment that can be used in community-based Indigenous languages projects. The Conference allows networking with inspirational groups of people who all share a common ambition of conserving and celebrating the languages.

The Conference was first held in Newcastle in 2007 and attended by 80 people. The majority of those being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders alongside one lone New Zealand person. The Conference is about the love for our languages and the need for them to continue with every ounce of emotion they bring. This is why in 2019 on Larrakia country nearly 600 people came together from all over Australia, the Torres Strait Islands, New Zealand, Canada, Hawaii, India, Nepal and many more locations around the world to be a part of the Conference.

The Conference was created by an Aboriginal language centre and to this day is still managed by them. It is now one of the largest indigenous language conferences held globally. This is testament to the efforts of each and every person that not just attends, but is working with a passion and devotion to keep our languages alive.

As the word itself 'PULiIMA' in the Awabakal language loosely translates as 'making voice', we will continue to give voice to our languages, as our languages will give voice to us.



Guidance for Stakeholders

This section provides community-led guidance, for all stakeholders who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, on the types of activities that the Directions Group and Australian Government consider will have the most impact in supporting languages.

The Directions Group and Australian Government acknowledge that different communities will have different aspirations for their languages. Activities that flow from this guidance must be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and consider cultural sensitivities that relate to specific demographics, such as gender, different age groups and geographic locations.

THEME 1 – STOP THE LOSS

In partnership with communities, develop a coordinated, national approach to supporting Australia's first languages:

- Design and implement government legislation, policies, services, strategies and programs in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to protect and strengthen languages.
 - Strengthen the languages sector by providing appropriate, safe and secure funding and infrastructure.
 - Develop a national mechanism for community engagement, advocacy, and agency in the languages sector.
 - Increase the number and capacity of language centres, nests, hubs, mobile centres and other community language groups, programs and projects.
 - Recognise and protect Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property, including tangible and intangible forms of language.
 - Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information.
 - Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research.
-

THEME 2 – ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITIES ARE CENTRE

Support a community-led approach to all language activity:

- Acknowledge that communities are at different stages of their language journeys and will have different aspirations and requirements.
- Support communities to develop and/or implement strategies, policies and protocols for language activity, where that is a local community priority.
- Develop community-led guidelines to operationalise working in partnership with language communities.
- Promote the importance of adhering to community-led guidelines and protocols when working with language communities.
- Strengthen and grow community-led partnerships between the languages sector and a wide range of stakeholders, across a wide range of sectors, professions and industries. This includes government at all levels, academia, the not-for-profit and private sectors.
- Support communities to embed the use of language in everyday life – at home, at work, at school, in the community and on Country.

Support communities to build and be the custodians of language resources and materials:

- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and knowledge systems into linguistic methodologies.
- Develop resources that document and record languages, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesauri, grammar and orthography documents.
- Record and digitise written and oral language collections, resources and materials.
- Provide communities with the support, training and infrastructure they require to build language resources and collections.
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to access and repurpose historical language materials.
- Repatriate language materials and cultural knowledge to community ownership and control.

Develop a strong, supported and skilled languages sector that can meet the increasing demand for language services:

- Support communities to innovate and develop new, culturally appropriate ways to deliver language services.
- Support the languages sector in developing industry standards and national fee-for-service guidelines.
- Support and strengthen career pathways and employment opportunities for language sector workers.
- Increase and promote community-led training, education and professional development opportunities, facilities, and resources.
- Identify opportunities for language roles and specialisation across all industries and professions.
- Invest in community-led technological development for language solutions.
- Expand teaching, interpreting and translation qualifications, including exploring new and innovative ways to recognise language skills in formal qualifications.
- Support communities to build relationships with, and garner support from the philanthropic and private sector.

Facilitate connections and create opportunities to collaborate:

- Support communities to share resources and learnings, including national and international best-practice language documentation, conservation, revival and educational practices.
- Support national and international exchanges and collaborations.

THEME 3 – INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Deliver community-led education and learning opportunities:

- Support life-long home and community-based language learning opportunities across all generations.
- Support communities to develop and implement strategies that support establishing and sustaining intergenerational transmission.
- Support language centres to strengthen links with schools and community groups.
- Support community-led media activities and programming that targets language use and learning.
- Explore and develop language programs in justice settings and with other disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.
- Support schools to provide the initial years of school education in the first language of students, in communities where children grow up hearing and speaking their language at home. Best practice would be to provide at least the first six years of schooling in language.
- Recognise and promote the right to conserve, use, develop and transmit languages to future generations, as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Support community-led development of language education resources:

- Support community-led development of resources, including curriculum and lesson plans for teaching languages.
- Build the capacity and capability of communities to support curriculum development.
- Support communities to exert their rights over Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property, to ensure that control remains with the communities that share their knowledge.
- Support communities to develop new software and build on existing applications and online resources that support language learning.

THEME 4 – CARING FOR COUNTRY

Embed languages in caring for Country:

- Embed and strengthen languages in land, sea and heritage conservation and management.
- Embed and strengthen languages in the conservation and safeguarding of flora and fauna habitats, and in traditional medicine and food.
- Support activities that recognise and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge Systems.

Strengthen language learning through connecting with Country:

- Support activities that provide access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to learn and practise language and culture on Country.
- Recognise the reciprocal relationship between language, Country and people.
- Provide opportunities for those who live off Country to access language.
- Support activities that respect, recognise and support the essential role of languages.

THEME 5 – TRUTH-TELLING AND CELEBRATION

Support truth-telling:

- Acknowledge the enduring impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- Implement structural change and broad reform that ensures communities have control over their languages.
- Support opportunities that share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, supported by authentic cultural and languages content.
- Support communities to share the challenges they have faced in reviving their languages.
- Recognise the role of languages in healing and social and emotional wellbeing.
- Develop language action plans and/or incorporate languages into Reconciliation Action Plans or similar, where that is a local community priority.

Embed the use of languages in everyday life:

- Employ language speakers across a wide range of sectors to deliver services in language, in particular essential services.
- Where services can't be provided in language, provide interpreting and translation services.
- Ensure language knowledge holders are remunerated for providing language services.
- Support language activities that contribute to cultural safety and creating safe environments.
- Increase community-led use of languages across a wide range of sectors and industries, such as health, education, justice, the environment, science and meteorology, tourism, information technology, communications, infrastructure, sport, media and broadcasting, film and television, the arts and creative industries, and the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector.

Deliver activities that celebrate, showcase and raise awareness of languages and the International Decade:

- Support conferences, events, festivals, speaker series and commemorative activities that celebrate and recognise languages locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.
- Embed languages into the national calendar of significant events.
- Support activities that raise awareness of the importance of languages, and that recognise and celebrate different languages and dialects, and sign languages.
- Encourage and support community-led returning of place names and dual naming initiatives.
- Support activities that showcase and promote languages nationally and internationally, including artistic, creative and cultural activities.



Photograph taken by Jessica Sabatino on Kulkalgai Country, courtesy of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

APPENDIX A

Reference List



Bell J (1994) Dictionary of the Gubbi-Gubbi and Butchulla languages / compiled by Jeanie Bell (Dulingbara and Jagera), with assistance from Amanda Seed, Brisbane.

Australian Government National Archives of Australia (NAA) (n.d.) Dispossession and revival of Indigenous languages, <https://www.naa.gov.au/learn/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/first-australians/history/dispossession-and-revival-indigenous-languages>.

Reconciliation Australia (2019), Let's Talk...Languages - Reconciliation Australia, <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/publication/lets-talk-languages/>.

Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC) (2020) National Indigenous Languages Report, <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/indigenous-languages-and-arts-program/national-indigenous-languages-report>.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2021) Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032), unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379853.

First Languages Australia (FLA) (2023), Gambay – First Languages Map, gambay.com.au

Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDC) (2023). Revive - a place for every story, a story for every place.



Photograph taken by Daryn McKenny (Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri) on Wirangu Country.



Australian Government



**FIRST
LANGUAGES
AUSTRALIA**



INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES
2022-2032



2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
Indigenous Languages