



State Library of Queensland Indigenous Languages Strategy

“Language is the expression of our culture and our land. We cannot have one without the others. We cannot describe our culture and our land if we do not have language.”

Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee

“ Recognition of Indigenous languages and support for Indigenous language programs stand alongside land rights, health, justice, education, housing, employment and other services as part of the overall process of pursuing social justice and reconciliation in Australia.

One might go so far as to say that without recognition of the Indigenous people and their languages, many other programs will be less effective, because this lack of recognition will show that the underlying attitudes of the dominant society have not changed significantly.”

Dr. Graham McKay. Edith Cowan University. *The Land Still Speaks*. 1996.

The languages of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are recognised as the cornerstone of indigenous cultural heritage, but suffer under pressures felt by many other threatened linguistic groups around the world. Of an original number of over 500 known Australian Indigenous languages and dialects, only 145 are still spoken and the vast majority of these, approximately 110, are in the severely and critically endangered categories.

The situation in Queensland is one of the most critical in Australia. The National Indigenous Languages Survey Report (NILS) 2005, commissioned by Department of Information Technology, Communications and the Arts (DCITA) and carried out by Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Federation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL), singled out Queensland as the state most lacking in language centres, either state or regional despite the presence of languages in all categories (from strong to no longer fully spoken).

The NILS report also recommended libraries as institutions that could play an important part in preserving and supporting Indigenous languages.

State Library of Queensland’s Responsibilities

State Library of Queensland (SLQ) is a leader in Australia in terms of providing services to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander clients. SLQ’s *Reconciliation Strategy* clearly states that one of the institution’s goals is to establish and maintain effective consultation and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organizations to ensure the provision of responsive and inclusive library services.

In November, 2006 , SLQ became the first state library in Australia to have an Indigenous Knowledge Centre, with the opening of *kuril dhagun*. This centre aims to celebrate a wide range of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, from the traditional to the contemporary. The main focus will be on intangible knowledge, such as language and oral histories.

SLQ is the convener of the National and State Libraries Australasia Indigenous Library Services and Collections Working Group. As such it is responsible for implementing the *National Policy Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Services and Collections*. SLQ holds Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, their interests, needs and perspectives as central to any development of policy or practice.

The *SLQ Protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections* stress the importance of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, as owners of their cultural heritage and knowledge, being able to interact with the State Library and to make use of the State Library's collections and services. Specifically this means that the State Library will:

- Promote and raise awareness of the State Library's collections and services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Develop and strengthen positive partnerships between the State Library and Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
- Encourage the use of State Library premises and facilities as meeting places and resources for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

Consultation and Partners

In efforts to support the preservation and maintenance of Indigenous languages SLQ will partner with language centres, people who work with languages, speakers, linguists, publishers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters, cultural corporations, public libraries and local Councils. It will be guided by these partners in devising strategies to support languages and in developing the appropriate services.

Consultation meetings will need to be held with key and strategic stakeholders to understand the needs of language centres and people who work with languages, and where possible, these needs will be matched to services available through the library. SLQ staff will also undertake site visits to talk to community language workers and to observe efforts to revive and preserve language at first hand. The Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee will form the basis of the consultation group, joined by other language workers, as appropriate.

State Library of Queensland's Commitment

As a result of this consultation the State Library has developed a broad statement of commitment to working to support Indigenous languages in Queensland. Specifically the State Library is committed to:

- Supporting the revival, reclamation and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Queensland
- Promoting awareness and interest in the Indigenous languages of Queensland in the broader community
- Ongoing consultation with the representative organisations and individuals for Indigenous Languages in Queensland so as to understand their needs and respond appropriately.



- Ensuring Language Centre workers, speakers and linguists are aware of the range of services available through the State Library.
- Facilitating access to the services and resources of the State Library and the network of Queensland's public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres.
- Offering the State Library as a safe repository for language resources, ensuring that digital and other resources remain available over time.
- Training SLQ staff in awareness of the cultural significance of languages and ensuring SLQ staff are aware of the organisation's commitment.
- Following the SLQ protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections in regard to the ownership of and access to Indigenous Language resources held in the library.
- Taking a lead role in supporting Indigenous languages with other State and Territory library services.
- Disseminating the findings and achievements to other similarly minded organisations through participation in national forums.

Strategies to support the Revival, Maintenance and Preservation of Indigenous Languages

The outlined commitments will be achieved through the following range of strategies, carried out by both the State Library of Queensland and other partner organisations:

- Holding regular consultation sessions with Queensland language centres and people involved in language work to keep abreast of current needs and initiatives.
- Forming partnerships with Language Centres to promote the importance and richness Queensland's Indigenous languages.
- Using State Library spaces such as *kuril dhagun* to promote Indigenous languages and the work being done to preserve and revive these languages.
- Providing space and support for exhibitions promoting language, generated by local community members with the support of library staff.
- Making language information and resources available through the State Library website.
- Promoting the Indigenous language resources held at the State Library to groups and individuals working in this area.
- Encouraging use of public library facilities for community Indigenous language activities, meetings and classes, particularly in areas where space for such activities is limited.
- Training in the use of digital equipment for language recording and advice on digital standards and preservation.



- Lending multi-media equipment for recording language and stories.
- Assisting language workers, speakers, linguists and others to access relevant language records and manuscripts.
- Encouraging the use of SLQ as a safe repository for copies of Indigenous language resources, to ensure that they are available to future generations.
- Purchasing and distributing published language materials through the Public Library Services of the State Library.
- Digitising photographic collections
- Sharing information about funding/partnership opportunities to support Indigenous languages
- Seeking additional funding to be able to extend the range of services available to language centres and people involved in language work
- Regularly reviewing the services being offered to language centres people involved in language work to make sure they are relevant.

Implementation of Strategies

Strategies to support Queensland Indigenous Languages will be implemented as part of SLQ's overall Strategic Plan 2007 – 2011 *Queensland Memory – Today for Tomorrow*, which has been written to specifically require SLQ to partner with Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities to record Indigenous knowledge, culture and histories.

The work will be led by SLQ's Indigenous Library Services Unit but will also involve other areas such as Heritage Collections (repository for language recordings, manuscripts and photographs) and the Resource and Discovery Unit, which looks at providing on-line access to resources.

July 2007 *This document has been revised and endorsed by the Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee at their meeting at SLQ in Brisbane, 17 – 18 July 2007.*

