

21 March 2019

### **Saving lost languages at State Library**

Century-old documents held at State Library of Queensland hold the key to the revival of near extinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders languages.

Indigenous Languages Coordinator, Des Crump, said word lists buried within mission records, scientific journals, pastoral records and personal diaries from as far back as the early 1800s will help revive the state's first languages.

"At the time of settlement there were about 250 distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages but only 145 are spoken in some form today."

"Of those, 110 are listed as critically endangered by the National Indigenous Languages Survey," he said.

"Ironically it is paperwork from places such as missions, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were forbidden from using their own language, which hold the key to the revival."

Mr Crump said during the International Year of Indigenous Languages State Library would continue to bring collection items to Elder gatherings and community groups to help spark social memory and save endangered languages.

"At one workshop in Mackay we brought a word list created by the Superintendent of the Aboriginal Mission at Port Mackay which contained 550 words from the Yuwibara people."

"Community members thought the local language was all but lost, but the once they saw the list it sparked collective memories that helped expand the list to over 1000 words."

The word list has been used in the translation of nursery rhymes and children's stories and will be turned into an app later this year.

### **Celebrating IYIL 2019 at State Library:**

- **Word of the week:** shared across Facebook, Twitter and [blogs](#)
- **Collections items:** the Meston and Margaret Lawrie collections
- **Indigenous language exhibition:** opening November
- **Workshops and events:** Elders and community gatherings, talks, language workshops, skills development, children's school holiday activities
- **Related days:** National Reconciliation Week (27 May – 3 Jun), NAIDOC Week (7–14 Jul), Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (4 Aug), Indigenous Literacy Day (9 Aug).

### **Quotes from Minister for the Arts Leeanne Enoch:**

"The International Year of Indigenous Languages raises awareness about the importance of Indigenous languages and its links to cultural history, traditions and memory."

“State Library’s work in engaging First Nations communities to preserve languages helps build knowledge and connections to the past.”

“Languages help to tell stories and I invite Queenslanders to participate in State Library’s celebration and activities throughout 2019.”

**Quotes from State Librarian and Chief Executive Officer Vicki McDonald:**

“Since 2006, the State Library of Queensland has actively worked with community groups, language workers, traditional custodians and local language champions to revive language.”

“State Library’s Indigenous Languages Project partners with Indigenous Knowledge Centres throughout Queensland, Indigenous Language Centres and other community groups to document, preserve and maintain over 105 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.”

“The International Year of Indigenous Languages provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the importance of language and the urgency to revive languages before they are lost forever.”