



Draft International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group—Terms of Reference

February 2022

These **draft** Terms of Reference will be considered at the first meeting of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group (Working Title).

Acknowledgement

The Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Elders past, present and future.

Overview

1. The Government, represented by the Office for the Arts (OFTA) within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (the Department), has policy responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, which includes:
 - a. Leading the Government’s participation in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-32 (International Decade).
 - b. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap): Target 16 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership (Clause 38 of Closing the Gap).
2. The Government is committed to working in formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve outcomes in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including through the establishment of an International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group (Directions Group).
3. The Directions Group will be established to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are partners in the development of initiatives for the International Decade, including through the development of Australia’s National Action Plan for the International Decade.
4. This partnership approach gives effect to Closing the Gap Priority Reform One (*formal partnerships and shared decision making*). This approach is also consistent with UNESCO’s recommendation to engage and support Indigenous language communities from the start of the International Decade.
5. The Directions Group will have access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and other industry experts, as required, to provide advice and expertise where necessary to ensure the Group has equal access to information to support shared decision-making. This approach is consistent with Closing the Gap Priority Reform Four (*shared access to data and information at a regional level*).

6. The Directions Group will also be supported by First Languages Australia, who will assist in engaging and consulting with key stakeholders, community members and organisations. OFTA will provide support in a secretariat capacity.

Current status of Indigenous languages

7. The Department administers the Indigenous Languages and Arts program, which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities around Australia.
8. Funding is used to support a network of 20 Indigenous language centres throughout the country working on documenting, revitalising and maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
9. Additional funding has been provided through the Commonwealth's first Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. This new investment comprises four elements:
 - a. Increased investment to support the existing network of Indigenous language centres
 - b. New investment to establish three new Indigenous language centres
 - c. Increased investment for Indigenous language projects that protect the most at-risk Indigenous languages
 - d. New investment in the development of place-based partnerships between Indigenous language centres and local service delivery partners in health and early childhood
10. According to the [latest National Indigenous Languages Survey \(2018-19\)](#), there were 123 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken, with only 14 considered strong, that is, with fluent speakers across all age groups.

Purpose

11. The Directions Group is one element of the Government's commitment to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
12. The overarching principle of the Directions Group is to establish direct dialogue and partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and decision makers within government, regarding activities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages over the course of the International Decade.
13. The Directions Group will provide strategic policy advice to government officials, including to inform the development of a National Action Plan which compliments key Australian Government priorities, including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Key Activities

14. The Directions Group will:
 - a. Provide strategic policy guidance to inform the development of a National Action Plan for the International Decade, and endorse the National Action Plan

- b. Provide policy advice from the perspective of the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' communities, including identifying any cultural sensitivities that may exist in relation to stakeholders, programs or activities for the International Decade
- c. Identify opportunities to maximise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in the International Decade and progress towards the Closing the Gap target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- d. Engage government officials, and external members with specialised expertise as required, on priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- e. Provide recommendations regarding the creation of an Australian logo for the International Decade
- f. Identify opportunities and partnerships to influence long term and sustained focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- g. Act as Champions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and the International Decade
- h. Work closely with the Department to provide advice to the Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts
- i. Work with the Department to convene working groups for particular activities, as required
- j. Report back to the Secretariat and Chair on any relevant interactions with stakeholders on Indigenous languages.

Governance

15. The Group will be chaired by a representative from First Languages Australia, the peak organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, in their capacity as a representative of the Pacific Region advising the UNESCO Global Taskforce Steering Committee during its first rotation.
16. The appointment of a co-chair will be a decision for the Group and determined at the first meeting.
17. Members will provide strategic advice and endorse initiatives, including on the following priorities:
 - a. The Australian National Action Plan for the International Decade
 - b. The Australian International Decade of Indigenous Languages logo
 - c. The International Decade Indigenous stakeholder engagement opportunities
18. Government representatives will be ex-officio members and provide input and advice where necessary and be champions of the Directions Group advice across the Government.
19. Secretariat support will be provided by OFTA who is responsible for providing timely and effective organisational support to the Directions Group and the Chair. The Secretariat will operate an action log on behalf of the Directions Group to capture actions to track and resolve crucial policy and implementation issues arising from discussions.

Membership (to be completed following EOI process)

20. A member must be a person of Aboriginal descent and/or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live and/or come from.¹
21. The Directions Group will be comprised of up to 12 representatives identified at Attachment A (TBA). Other members may be invited to participate, as determined by the Directions Group.

Remuneration

22. Members will be remunerated for official business and travel. Payment is in line with the *Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-time Public Office) Determination 2021*, commenced 1 July 2021, at the rate of “Offices not specified”. Travel expenses will be paid at the Tier 2 rate of “Holders of Part-time Public Office” as determined by the *Remuneration Tribunal Determination for Official Travel by Office Holders’* most updated determination.

Timeframes

23. The Directions Group will meet at least 4 times in 2022, and may be required to provide input and review documents out of session.
24. The Directions Group is anticipated to run until 30 December 2022. The Group will end following the completion of a work plan and dissemination activities, unless otherwise altered or ended by agreement.

Limitations

25. The Australian Government retains executive powers for final decisions relating to expenditure of public funds. The Department commits to working transparently with the Directions Group to ensure members understand any limitations to shared decision-making, including providing enough information and time for members to understand any implications of decisions taken by government.

Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

26. Members may, on occasion, be provided with confidential material. Any confidential information acquired is to be handled in a secure manner and only used for the purposes for which it was received and without gaining personal advantage or promoting personal interests.
27. Members of the Directions Group will ensure that no action or decision is taken that places their own interests ahead of the Group’s. All members will be required to disclose their interests to the Chair, they will be recorded in meeting minutes and the Chair will decide if the person must refrain from contributing to discussion.
28. Members will be required to complete a Deed of Confidentiality form and Conflict of Interest declaration.

¹ Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Protocols Guide*, July 2017, pg 5.