

## **SUBMISSION TO THE INDIGENOUS VOICE CO-DESIGN PROCESS APRIL 2021**

The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission and express its support of the Indigenous Voice Proposal.

The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF), established in 1999, is a national charity dedicated to raising language, literacy and numeracy standards in Australia. ALNF believes that literacy is freedom - literacy allows individuals to access education, participate meaningfully in our society and to have a voice. It is a basic human right.

*"I am alive again. Listen!  
Language is my life.  
You have given me back my life.  
I am alive again."*

- Warumungu Elder, Tennant Creek NT.

The opening lines of the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper: Indigenous Voice Proposal (page 7) state:

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are rich in knowledge, passing stories from generation to generation. They hold a unique place in our nation's story. The next step in this story is to make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have more of a say on the laws, policies and services that impact their lives."

These lines are unequivocally accurate but, a central point is missing from this statement.

That point is this: Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages are not strong enough to carry forward the cultural richness, knowledge and stories which have been passed along the generations. To truly honour the sentiment in the opening lines above, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages require urgent focus to regain and sustain their place as proficient conveyors of meaningful communication to 'hold a unique place in our nation's story.'

ALNF strongly supports prioritisation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to regain and sustain their First Languages to pass stories, culture and knowledge to the next generation and to reclaim their unique place in the nation's story.

Central to the ethical and robust revitalisation of First Languages are a number of clearly stated proposal elements in this Discussion Paper which will ensure that First Language work is and remains authentic. ALNF supports the regional and local level governance structure set out in the Indigenous Voice Proposal to ensure locally designed and led input, local advice to all levels of government and working partnerships to hear and action the local communities and organisation aspirations. It is

ALNF's opinion that this proposed structure has the potential to prioritise and strengthen First Language revitalisation.

From ALNF's experience, the nine principles set out to guide Local and Regional Voices will assist all participants to communicate clearly about First Language initiatives according to these clearly stated principles:

1. Empowerment – providing First Language decision making to be generated at a local/regional level;
2. Inclusive participation – providing input into First Language initiatives from across a broad spectrum of contributors;
3. Cultural Leadership – providing First Language initiatives with essential leadership and input;
4. Community-led Design – providing First Language initiatives with relevant applications to local priorities and contexts to meet local needs and aspirations;
5. Non-duplication and Links with Existing Bodies – providing First Language initiatives to network and strengthen;
6. Respectful Long-term Partnerships – providing First Language initiatives with longevity and integration into broader contexts;
7. Transparency and Accountability – ensuring First Language initiatives are always part of a solid protocol structure which will safeguard against any future disruption to First Language excellence;
8. Capability Driven – quality First Language initiatives will provide abundant opportunities for leadership from the local/regional levels through to the national and international levels;
9. Data and Evidence-based Decision Making – providing First Language initiatives with the evidence to take a centre stage position amongst the voices to be heard today and into the future.

Through our collaborations with communities implementing ALNF's Living First Language Platform and programs we have witnessed how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages can flow from the 'old days' into the digital age.

The National Voice Proposal will ensure that the necessary governance and protective factors surround First Language initiatives to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and, enrich all Australians.

**Mary-Ruth Mendel**

Speech and Language Pathologist

Co-Founder, Co-Chair and Executive Director

The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation