**Australia’s response to the un expert mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples’ questionnaire on access to justice**

**February 2013**

1. **Does the state have an overarching national implementation strategy to attain the goals of the Declaration?**

The Australian Government announced its support for the Declaration on 3 April 2009. Along with the National Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples, and in particular, the Stolen Generations, the announcement demonstrated the Government’s commitment to strengthening the relationship and ensuring genuine engagement with Indigenous Australians.

The Australian Government’s overarching approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage is through the *Closing the Gap* strategy. The Government is accountable to the Australian people through the Prime Minister’s *Closing the Gap* report which is tabled in Parliament annually.

In 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership between all levels of government to work with Indigenous communities to achieve the target of *Closing the Gap* in Indigenous disadvantage.

The COAG reform agenda is implemented through [National Agreements](http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/faqs.cfm#national_agreement), National Partnerships and other intergovernmental agreements. Improving outcomes for Indigenous people requires adoption of a multifaceted approach that sees effort across a range of areas. Under the [National Indigenous Reform Agreement](http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_agreements.aspx), all Australian governments have shared responsibility for *Closing the Gap* in Indigenous disadvantage across six key areas – life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, literacy and numeracy, education attainment and economic participation.

COAG also agreed to core Service Delivery Principles that apply when developing and delivering services for Indigenous people and communities including:

* + - * the Indigenous engagement principle – engagement with Indigenous people and
      * communities is central to the design and delivery of programs and services; and
      * the access principle – programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.

Each year, the COAG Reform Council has the role to report to COAG on the performance of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments against the objectives and outcomes of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement.

The principles of the Declaration are consistent with the Government’s approach to *Closing the Gap*. In partnership with States and Territories, the Government is making an unprecedented effort to bring about long term positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians, with more than $5.2 billion in funding for employment, education, health services, community development and community safety. The Australian Government is committed to working in partnership with stakeholders to achieve these outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

International action

At the United Nations General Assembly’s Third Committee in 2010, Australia also supported a proposal to organise a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples to be held in 2014. The purpose of the meeting will be to share perspectives and best practices on the realisation of the rights of Indigenous peoples, including pursuing the objectives of the Declaration.

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the Australian Government announced the development of an International Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Land and Sea Managers Network and conference to be held in May 2013. The conference will cover a range of subjects under five main themes: Territories, lands and waters; Communities and relationships; Cultures and knowledge; Resources and livelihoods; and Networks and exchanges.

**2. Have specific legal, policy or other measures been adopted especially to implement any or all rights in the Declaration?**

The Australian Government is committed to an approach to the Declaration which is consistent with its domestic and international obligations, including in respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Government’s Indigenous policies are broadly consistent with the spirit of the Declaration and relevant agencies within the Government liaise closely on relevant issues to ensure that these issues are taken into account in policy and program development.

The Government is committed to building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people based on mutual respect. A number of relevant initiatives are outlined below.

The establishment of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples

The Government has established the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples. The National Congress provides a voice for Indigenous Australians and an opportunity to build new relationships with government and industry to secure the economic, social and cultural futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The National Congress and the Australian Government have finalised a framework of engagement to assist the National Congress to provide strategic input into national policies and programs that impact on the lives of Indigenous Australians. In addition to its investment to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage, the Australian Government is supporting Indigenous culture. In 2011-12, over $26 million was administered to support over 294 Indigenous cultures, languages and visual arts activities across Australia with the majority of this funding delivered to regional and remote communities. In addition, through the Indigenous Employment Initiative, over $20 million was invested in 2011-12 to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in jobs to deliver arts, culture, languages and broadcasting programs in regional and remote areas. This funding supports over 600 jobs that provide Indigenous Australians with increased economic independence, mainstream employment conditions and skills development.

Additional major government investments to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage include $3.4 billion for Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory – a comprehensive ten-year plan to support Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to live strong, independent lives.

The Government has also invested $291.2 million over six years for Remote Service Delivery (commenced December 2008) to increase access to services and raise the level of government services, build community governance capacity, provide translation services to assist in better understanding the needs of communities, build an evidence base on what services are needed in each location, develop local implementation plans in 29 priority locations, and develop and operate in a single government interface to make it easier for community to connect with government.

Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation

In accordance with Article 12.2 of the Declaration, the Australian Government’s Policy on Indigenous Repatriation provides a framework for and commitment to the repatriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains from international cultural collections and the repatriation of secret sacred objects and ancestral remains from Australian collecting institutions.

Health services

Australia also takes very seriously its commitment to Indigenous health, and has implemented several targeted programs which are relevant to Articles 17, 21, 23, and 24 of the Declaration.

Through its dedicated Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH), Australia’s long term strategy is to improve the access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to comprehensive primary health care services. The aim is to provide coordinated clinical care, population health and health promotion activities to facilitate illness prevention, early intervention and effective disease management. Evidence from Australia and overseas shows that improved access to comprehensive primary health care can make a real and sustainable difference to health status in the longer term.   
  
This strategy is firmly based on the principle of working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health sector.

Australia aims to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to effective health care services essential to improving health, and life expectancy, and reducing child mortality.

To contribute to closing the gap in Indigenous life expectancy within a decade, Australia is addressing the following areas of health:

1. primary Health Care;
2. social and Emotional Wellbeing;
3. substance Use;
4. child and Maternal Health;
5. chronic Disease;
6. remote Services (including Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory); and
7. workforce.

Specific programs have been introduced to address these priorities, including:

*The Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership*, which provides a framework for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) child development targets to:

* halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
* halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and
* ensure all Indigenous four year olds have access to quality early childhood education within five years, including in remote areas.

*The New Directions* *Program,* which aims to:

* provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their mothers with access to antenatal care, standard information about baby care, practical advice and assistance with breastfeeding, nutrition and parenting;
* monitor developmental milestones, immunisation status and infections; and

undertake health checks for Indigenous children before starting school.

The *New Directions* service delivery model is adaptable to meet the needs of individual communities and varies across Australia. Indigenous elders are consulted to ensure the program is culturally appropriate.

The *Healthy for Life Program*: which seeks to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, babies and children. It also aims to improve the quality of life for people with a chronic condition and, over time, reduce the incidence of adult chronic disease.

The objectives of *Healthy for Life* are to:

* improve the availability of child and maternal health care;
* improve the prevention, early detection and management of chronic disease;
* improve men’s health;
* improve the long-term health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
* increase the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce through the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme.

Currently around 100 primary health care services are participating in the program in 57 sites located in urban, regional and remote centres across the country. The flexibility of the *Healthy for Life* program enables services to develop priorities in line with local needs and to shift these priorities over time as needs and circumstances change.

Further advice on Australian health programs is provided in response to question three.

Addressing family violence and incarceration

In accordance with Article 22.2 of the Declaration, Australia is committed to taking *“measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.”* The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022 is a whole of government commitment to make a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women and their children. The National Plan’s vision is for Australian women and their children to live free from violence in safe communities, recognises the high incidence of violence experienced by Indigenous women and their children, and focuses on ways to strengthen Indigenous communities to prevent violence.

Outcome 3 of the National Plan has a specific focus on addressing the experience of domestic and family violence of Indigenous Australian women and their children through strengthening Indigenous communities. This will be achieved through fostering the leadership of Indigenous women within communities and broader Australian society in governance and decision-making for communities and organisations, building local community capacity, and improving access to appropriate services for Indigenous women and their children.

In the 20 years since the landmark *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report,* the incarceration rate of Indigenous Australians, including

Indigenous youth, continues to increase. Indigenous juveniles are 28 times more likely than non-Indigenous juveniles to be incarcerated, despite Indigenous peoples representing only 2.5 percent of the Australian population. Indigenous social and economic disadvantage have contributed to the high levels of Indigenous contact with the criminal justice system. Intergenerational dysfunction in some Indigenous communities presents a significant challenge to break the cycle of offending, recidivism and incarceration.

In June 2011, the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs’ released its report *Doing Time - Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system.*

The report focuses on factors contributing to the over-representation of Indigenous children and young people in the criminal justice system, such as poor police relations, alcohol and substance abuse, poor education, unemployment, inadequate housing and entrenched disadvantage. These same factors were identified 20 years earlier by the Royal Commission in their inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

The report makes 40 recommendations focusing on prevention and early intervention measures in the areas of health, housing, education, employment and training, transitioning from detention, substance misuse and the justice system.

On 24 November 2011, the Commonwealth Government accepted all 40 of the report’s recommendations either in whole, in part or in principle and outlined its current and intended actions to address the recommendations, highlighting the importance of working in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Some of the Australian Government actions include:

* dedicated funding to Australia’s States and Territories to improve Indigenous education, health, family services and employment opportunities;
* developing a suicide prevention strategy for Indigenous communities;
* working with state and territory Governments to ensure police receive appropriate training that covers cultural awareness and capability, local cultural issues and working with people with hearing loss and cognitive impairment;
* evaluating existing Indigenous justice programs under the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework to establish best practice;, and
* providing greater opportunities for Indigenous people to join the Australian Defence Force.

Access to justice for the indigenous peoples of Australia

Australia recognises the wrongs previous governments have committed in their treatment of the indigenous communities. Indigenous children in Australia have been especially vulnerable to institutional abuses including in the context of Government policies of forcibly removing children from their families. *Bringing Them Home,* the Australian Government’s 1997 report into these histories, was an important step towards justice for many of the children so badly affected by these past policies and practices.

In late 2012, the Australian Government announced a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. As part of refining the Terms of Reference, and given the history of institutional abuses in the context of Indigenous child removals, the Australian Government conducted targeted face-to-face consultations with a range of people and organisations representing Indigenous Australians and their interests in the Royal Commission. Indigenous Australians were invited to put their thoughts forward either publicly or anonymously. The Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, announced the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission in January 2013.

In addition, Professor Helen Milroy has been appointed as a Commissioner. Professor Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. She is currently a Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and Winthrop Professor and Director for the Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health at the University of Western Australia.

Despite the concerted efforts of governments and community service providers, Indigenous children are more likely than non-Indigenous children to be disadvantaged across a broad range of health, development and wellbeing indicators. The *Closing the Gap* priority under the Second Action Plan of the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s children 2009-2020 aims to ensure that Indigenous families and communities are in a position to provide their children with the safe and supportive environments they need to reach their full potential. Providing high quality and timely care to people who have experienced violence is crucial to preventing the cycle from continuing as is addressing the high number of offenders and victims of crime in Indigenous communities.

Abuse and neglect can be prevented by addressing disadvantage, (for example overcrowded and inadequate housing), recognising and promoting family, community and cultural strengths that protect children and young people, and developing community-wide strategies to address specific risk factors where they occur in high concentration, such as alcohol misuse and family violence. It is critical that approaches are holistic and culturally sensitive, and empower families and communities to develop and take responsibility for community-identified solutions.

**3. When devising laws, policies or other measures that affect indigenous peoples, do governmental bodies routinely take into account the Declaration (including indigenous peoples’ rights to participate in decision making that affects them)?**

Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices need to be at the heart of policy and program making if they are to work, and noting the emphasis of the Declaration on the importance of consulting Indigenous people in relation to matters that directly affect them, the Australian Government has a sustained focus on building genuine engagement with Indigenous peoples and ensuring their adequate participation in the life of the nation. In an administrative context, the Australian Government reaches out to Indigenous Australians through a network of offices across the country.  These include 29 [Indigenous Coordination Centres](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/families/Pages/indigenous_ccs_roc.aspx#icc) and six [Regional Operations Centres](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/families/Pages/indigenous_ccs_roc.aspx#roc), designed with the aim of carrying out best practice government service delivery and engagement across urban, regional and remote areas.

These administrative arrangements are supported by an Indigenous Engagement Framework, which captures the Australian Government’s aspirations to engage effectively with Indigenous peoples and a range of tools for achieving those aspirations.

The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples has been established to provide a voice for Indigenous Australians, and provide the opportunity to build relationships with governments and industry to secure the economic, social, cultural and environmental futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Adequate consultation retains its importance in the context of the Government’s commitment to explore with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians the question of recognising the unique place of Australia’s First Peoples in the Australian Constitution. This initiative reflects the Australian Government’s broader goal to increase respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In December 2010, the Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, appointed an Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to consider, consult and advise the Government on how best to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution and on possible options for change that would likely get the support of the majority of Australians at a referendum. The Expert Panel included parliamentarians from all major Australian political parties and Independents, Indigenous and community leaders, and legal and constitutional law experts. In conducting its consultations and developing recommendations, the Expert Panel held more than 250 meetings with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across Australia, including 84 public consultations, consulted with more than 4,600 people and received more than 3,500 submissions, including from Indigenous organisations and survey responses from members of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples.

Economic participation

The Australian Government also acknowledges the importance of economic participation for Indigenous peoples, including in the context of the Declaration.

To increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the economy, the Australian Government’s Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018 (IEDS) was released on 19 October 2011. It provides a whole-of-government framework for future actions, programs and policies for Indigenous economic development, as part of the wider *Closing the Gap* strategy agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in 2008. The IEDS aims to support the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in Australia’s strong economy and financially and socially benefit from work. The strategy was the product of extensive consultations with Indigenous Australians, all levels of government and the private and not-for-profit sectors.

The next phase of the Indigenous Economic Development framework was put in place with the announcement on 26 April 2012 of the new *Remote Jobs and Communities* Program (RJCP). Starting on 1 July 2013, the new program will make significant changes to employment, participation and community-development services in up to 65 remote regions across Australia, focused on getting people into jobs and building strong communities. The reforms have been widely discussed with Indigenous and other people and communities in remote Australia, where some 85 per cent of those needing assistance to find work are Indigenous people.

Through Community Action Plans, communities will have a central role in determining how providers will work to maximise employment and participation in a region.

On two occasions in the last three years the Australian Government has undertaken extensive consultations with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to hear the views of local people and inform government decisions on major legislative reforms and the provision of services to help reduce the extent of Aboriginal disadvantage.

In the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* consultations that were conducted in 2011, whole-of-community meetings were held in 100 remote communities and town camps, together with public meetings in major towns. Trained and well-prepared interpreters were on hand to assist in most of the whole-of-community meetings. To ensure that everyone who wanted to had the opportunity to have their say, there were also hundreds of less formal discussions across the Northern Territory with individuals, families and other groups in communities.

Access to health services

The delivery of health, universal child and family health services are primarily delivered by State and Territory Governments in Australia. However, the Australian Government is responsible for a number of policies and programs that focus on the health and wellbeing of children.

Each program recognises “the right of Indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.” As the programs are rolled out, Indigenous families and communities are consulted on implementation issues.

Australia has implemented a direct grants system for health, substance use, social and emotional wellbeing and mental health service delivery, which is provided to around 280 organisations, of which around 70% are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled or managed. These organisations provide one or more of the following services: clinical care and health education, promotion, screening, immunisation and counselling, as well as specific programs such as hearing health, sexual health, substance use and mental health.

Australia also recognises that “*indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.*”There are benefits, payments and services available to all Australians to help with the cost of health care services, through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and prescription medicines, through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule (PBS).

Australia has implemented a range of health measures specifically tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Medicare Australia – Australia’s health payments and programs delivery agency – administers a number of these programs such as the health assessments (55 years and over), the adult health check, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Access Line (a free-call telephone service to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers and health workers), and the Voluntary Indigenous Identifier (used to improve Indigenous people’s access to health programs, by directing services and funding to those locations which require them most).

The cost of medicines has been identified as a significant barrier to improved access to medicines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Access to PBS medicines is an important aspect of preventing and treating illnesses.

Since 2010, Australia has provided further assistance with the cost of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients living with, or at risk of, chronic disease.

Eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, who would normally pay the full PBS co-payment (the amounts paid by patients for each PBS medicine), pay the concessional rate, while those patients who would normally pay the concessional price receive their PBS medicines without a patient co-payment. PBS medicines are provided to patients of Aboriginal Health Services at the time of consultations and at no cost to the patient, by a suitably qualified and approved health professional, in accordance with relevant legislation.

Increased access to the PBS will help improve the prevention and management of chronic disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Around 70,000 people are expected to benefit by the end of 2012-13.

Traditional Cultural Expressions policy

The Australian Government is currently developing a domestic policy to protect traditional cultural expressions. This work directly acknowledges **Article 13 and Article 31 of the Declaration***.* Indigenous persons have been extensively consulted in the creation of this policy and the policy directly contributes towards Indigenous peoples ‘…right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions…’

National Indigenous Languages Policy

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the ability to speak or use words and phrases of Indigenous languages is a critical factor in cultural identity and individual and community wellbeing. Languages are both an expression of culture and the vehicle through which culture is kept alive. Languages signify more than a means of communication; they have important ties and connections to knowledge, history, culture, identity, country and a people’s world view. Further, being able to converse in one’s own language helps produce a strong sense of self and a sense of cultural continuity.

The rich cultural practices, knowledge systems and cultural expressions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a source of great strength, resilience and pride. Strong cultural identity is fundamental to Indigenous health and social and emotional wellbeing.

The Australian Government is working to update its national policy on the maintenance, revival and transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The first policy of this kind at the national level was released in 2009. This policy provides a whole-of-government commitment to addressing the serious problem of language loss in Australian Indigenous communities. The development of an updated policy is underpinned by, and directly acknowledges, Article 13 of the Declaration.

The Australian Government also provides grants to support the maintenance and transmission of traditional culture and contemporary Indigenous cultural expression through the Indigenous Culture Support program. Funding supports cultural exchange among different communities and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as well as placing emphasis on participation and achievements that enrich Indigenous culture, develop skills and encourage a strong sense of identity in communities.

Under the Closing the Gap National Indigenous Reform Agreement all Australian State and Territory governments agreed on six core service delivery principles for designing and delivering services for Indigenous people – including that services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people, including access to interpreters when needed.  In addition, the Government provides funding for Indigenous interpreting.

**4. Has the Government endeavoured to raise awareness about the Declaration to various levels of the community and governance to enhance the prospects of it implementation?**

**If yes:**

* **please explain the initiatives the Government has undertaken**
* **does this include translation of the Declaration into different languages?**
* **has the Declaration been disseminated widely? If not:**
* **what steps, if any, are planned to raise awareness about the Declaration?**
* **if there are no plans to raise awareness about the Declaration, why not?**

The Australian Human Rights Commission, Australia’s independent national human rights institution, has developed several resources to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to understand and protect their rights. These resources include an overview and community guide on the Declaration, as well as a poster, which aim to bring the Declaration to life by highlighting existing examples of Indigenous peoples’ rights in action.

The resources may be viewed at the following link: <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/declaration_indigenous/declaration_full.html>

**5. What are the main challenges encountered in adopting measures and implementing strategies to attain the goals of the Declaration?**

The Australian Government’s overarching approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage is through the *Closing the Gap* strategy which includes an emphasis on mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Government’s approach *to Closing the Gap* is consistent with the principles of the Declaration.

Domestically, under the Australian Constitution, many powers are exercised by Australian States and Territories, while others are exercised by the Federal Government. As such, ensuring consistency of delivery between states can be challenging.

**6. In the light of the information provided above, what are your views on best practices regarding possible appropriate measures and Implementation strategies to attain the goals of the Declaration?**

**Please also consider and, if relevant, comment on the role that can be played by international institutions, including the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to assist states in adopting measures and implementation strategies to attain the goals of the Declaration.**

The Australian Government has taken the approach that it is important to establish an appropriately resourced overarching approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Australia is doing this through its *Closing the Gap* strategy.

The Australian Government’s approach to promoting respect for, and recognition of, language and culture is a good example of Australia’s pursuit of implementing the Declaration. The preservation of Indigenous languages can be seen as a best practice measure which, in the Australian context, is also having the effect of resetting the relationship between the Government and Indigenous Australians.

The 2011 report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* which drew on survey and census data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics based on their wellbeing framework (which includes e.g. culture, heritage, health, education, customary, voluntary and paid work, income and economic resources, and citizenship and governance), noted that ‘[c]ultural strength is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous wellbeing’ (2.13).

The Australian Government announced a National Indigenous Languages policy in 2009. Among its key aims are: bringing national attention to Indigenous languages; reinforcing the use of critically endangered Indigenous languages; restoring the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages; strengthening pride in identity and culture; and supporting and maintaining the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in schools.

In further recognition of the links between the health of languages and the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, the government funds the Indigenous languages support program which assists the maintenance and revival of Indigenous languages. The program aims to address the erosion and loss of these languages by supporting community based projects such as language groups, language research and coordination of language resources.

This program of work suggests that effort across a number of fronts is needed to address the causes of the erosion of Indigenous languages. In Australia that effort is accompanied by support for interpreter services to ensure that Indigenous Australians, particularly those who do not speak English fluently, can access services and participate in civic life.

The Council of Australian Governments has agreed that the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments should develop a national framework for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters. Governments are working with the Indigenous interpreting sector and other stakeholders to develop the framework.

In December 2010, the Government appointed an Expert Panel to consider, consult and advise the Government on possible options for recognising Indigenous Australians in the Australian Constitution. The Expert Panel, which included Indigenous Australians, reported its findings to the Government in January 2012. Those findings included a recommendation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages and heritage be recognised in Australia’s Constitution.

On the basis of its current and wide-ranging efforts to preserve Indigenous languages, Australia looks forward to making a contribution to this important work in the context of discussions at, and leading up to, the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.