



**RECOVER
RE-VOICE
RE-PRACTISE**

**FOUNDATIONS
FRAMEWORK
ABORIGINAL
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE NESTS [ALCN]
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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NSW AECG Incorporated
Supported by



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ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE NESTS IN NSW

DOCUMENT 1.
DOCUMENT 2.

FOUNDATIONS FRAMEWORK
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIGURES AND TABLES	1
KEY TERMINOLOGY	2
AUTHOR PREFACE	3
1. BACKGROUND.....	4
2. FOUNDATIONS FRAMEWORK.....	6
2.1 Vision Statement.....	6
2.2 Core Values	7
2.3 Guiding Principles.....	7
2.4 Goals	8
3. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE RIGHTS	10
REFERENCES.....	11

“It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century. With the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages, humanity would lose not only a cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded, in particular, in indigenous languages.”

UNESCO, *Endangered Languages*
<<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/languages-and-multilingualism/endangered-languages/>>

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1	A Vision for Awareness, Reclamation and Revitalisation Contexts, page 6
Figure 2	A Vision for ALCN in NSW, page 7
Figure 3	Core Values for ALCN in NSW, page 7
Figure 4	Guiding Principles for ALCN in NSW, page 8

Table 1	Key Terminology, page 2
Table 2	Primary Goals for ALCN in NSW, pages 8 - 9

KEY TERMINOLOGY

<p>LANGUAGE AWARENESS</p>	<p>Language awareness equates with the absence of knowledge and use of mother tongue. At this level mother tongue is classified in linguistic terminology as 'moribund', as there are no known language informants left. When a language has been designated as moribund it has been recognised as inactive. Mother tongue can only be recovered by researching secondary historical sources. Typically, language awareness progresses the accrual of basic wordlists and fosters limited re-voicing of mother tongue.</p>
<p>LANGUAGE RECLAMATION</p>	<p>Language reclamation equates with highly diminished knowledge and use of mother tongue. At this level mother tongue is classified as highly endangered because there are only a few remaining language informants. Mother tongue is still primarily recovered by researching secondary historical sources. Typically language reclamation progresses the accrual of sound word/phrase lists and fosters wider re-voicing of mother tongue.</p>
<p>LANGUAGE REVITALISATION</p>	<p>Language revitalisation equates with continued, though incomplete, knowledge and use of mother tongue. At this level mother tongue is classified as endangered because word/phrase usage is not widespread across a language community. Language is primarily recovered through the input of existing language informants and the support of additional research activity. Typically, language revitalisation progresses the accrual of comprehensive word lexicons and phrasebooks. This then progresses the re-voicing of mother tongue in degrees of speech fluency.</p>
<p>LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE</p>	<p>Language maintenance usually equates with full speech fluency, though mother tongue, at this level, can still be considered as 'at risk'. Language maintenance does not usually involve a great deal of effort in terms of language recovery, it is more centred on sustaining the voicing of mother tongue by ensuring that each new generation uptakes mother tongue at the highest possible level of speech fluency. Notwithstanding this, the underlying premise behind the idea of language maintenance can be applied successfully to less speech fluent language revitalisation contexts, and even quite well in language reclamation and language awareness contexts.</p>
<p>LANGUAGE NESTS</p>	<p>Originally, language nests were pioneered as community centred preschool language immersion initiatives. These initiatives were created to provide opportunities for older fluent speakers of mother tongue to pass their knowledge of mother tongue onto younger generations in a language immersion environment. Language nests were a direct strategic response to fear over acute decline in the fluent use of mother tongue. Language nests have since evolved into whole of community language and culture initiatives capable of supporting language awareness, reclamation and revitalisation activity, as well as fulfilling the original purpose of language maintenance for self-renewal of full speech fluency.</p>
<p>LANGUAGE IMMERSION</p>	<p>Language immersion is a specific language education context wherein the language that is being taught is used almost exclusively. With First Nation languages immersion moves language learning away from teaching words and phrases using English as the language of instruction into teaching whole curricula using mother tongue as the language of instruction. Immersion equates with language maintenance because full or near full speech fluency is needed in order to create an immersion environment. Where language revitalisation has resulted in the development of comprehensive word lexicons and phrase books moderated forms of immersion are possible.</p>

TABLE 1 - KEY TERMINOLOGY

AUTHOR PREFACE

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in NSW Document No.1 *Foundations Framework* and Document No.2 *Implementation Plan* have been written as companion documents. Both documents have been commissioned by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc.) in partnership with the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) to support the implementation of Aboriginal language and culture nests (ALCN) within New South Wales (NSW). This *Foundations Framework* presents a theoretical platform for establishing ALCN within NSW whilst the *Implementation Plan* translates this theoretical platform into a blueprint for applied action.

I have consciously chosen to write both documents using a first person approach, as though I were talking directly to my own peoples, that is the Aboriginal peoples of NSW. I have taken this approach in order to ground my cultural position, and therefore my authorship, as purposed towards empowering Aboriginal community self-determination. I sincerely hope that together these documents will be of operable value to all of us out in our communities, as we work together to recover our languages and cultures, so that we can re-voice our mother tongues and re-practise our mother cultures within our own communities.

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1. BACKGROUND

The meaning embodied in the words of Professor Fishman¹ compellingly communicates an ultimate challenge to us, the Aboriginal peoples of NSW, regarding the future of our mother tongues and our mother cultures. To enable us to fully appreciate the gravity of this challenge we need to emphasise the difference between what existed for us foundationally and what we have now.

We can begin to do this by consulting data contained within AUSTLANG.² This database, which is managed by AIATSIS³, currently indicates that the number of Aboriginal languages originally spoken in NSW exceeded 100. What is disquieting about AUSTLANG data is that it also indicates that only a few of these languages are currently known and/or used by us. The Australian Bureau of Statistics similarly reports that 93% of us in NSW speak English exclusively.⁴ This statistic, together with AUSTLANG data, confirms all too well that in NSW the state of our languages, and by association our cultures, is classifiably dire.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THE MOTHER TONGUE BEFORE SCHOOL, IN SCHOOL, OUT OF SCHOOL, AND AFTER SCHOOL? BECAUSE THAT DETERMINES ITS FATE, WHETHER IT IS GOING TO BECOME SELF-RENEWING

**Professor
Joshua A. Fishman**

Even though we have some robust mother tongues within our State⁵, there remains a critical mass that are not. This assuredly compels urgent action, but there are no quick fix solutions to be had, especially given that some of our ancestral nations have been devastated to a point where it will take years of persistent research and dedicated community action to meaningfully regain both language and culture. Given this, we need to ask ourselves - *what can we do to recover our mother tongues and mother cultures?*, and *what can we do to transition this recovery into a cultural routine that envelops us in the re-voicing of our mother tongues and the pre-practise of our mother cultures in line with Fishman's concept of cultural self-renewal?*

To achieve cultural self-renewal we must put in place mechanisms that maintain our active continuous re-voicing of mother tongue and re-practise of mother culture. Internationally, the re-voicing of First Nation mother tongues has been accomplished through immersion based language nests.⁶ Language nests, which envelop a young child within the realm of mother tongue, offer a strategic solution for encouraging

¹ JA Fishman as cited in Williams, ST, *The Importance of Teaching and Learning Aboriginal Languages and Cultures*, Aboriginal Affairs, Surry Hills, NSW, 2011, p.65.

² AUSTLANG (Australian Indigenous Languages Database), <http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au/main.php>

³ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2006, Cat. No. 4713.0, Reissued 4 May, ABS, Canberra, 2010.

⁵ Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, *Final Report*, NSW Government, 2013 and OCHRE: *NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: Education, Employment and Accountability*, NSW Government, 2013 [Both documents identify the Gamilaraay, Gumbaynggirr, Bundjalung, Paarkinthi/Barkindji and Wiradjuri languages as strong].

⁶ See *Key Terminology*, p.2.

Indigenous uptake and everyday use of mother tongue, particularly in situations where mother tongue is still spoken by senior generations. The key impetus behind language nesting is to bring senior and younger generations together to secure the handing on of mother tongue, and as an inevitable outcome mother culture.

In Australia, the Commonwealth Government House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs acknowledged, in its landmark inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities, the merit of language nests as a means of safeguarding Indigenous language usage.⁷ This affirmation seems immediately relevant to those Indigenous communities where mother tongue still has presence as first tongue, rather than communities with diminished language contexts. The idea of language nests, however, has begun to evolve beyond being wholly enveloped within language immersion. In NSW in particular nests are now being conceptualised as language and culture initiatives.

By diversifying the idea of nesting we open up constructive language and culture recovery, re-voicing and re-practise pathways for revitalisation, reclamation and awareness contexts.⁸ The NSW Government has moved to ensure that this occurs by centring the establishment of ALCN within their OCHRE plan.⁹ OCHRE resulted from a series of recommendations made by the NSW Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. One of these recommendations was that ALCN "...be developed in partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc...".¹⁰ Accordingly, the NSW AECG Inc. presents this *Foundations Framework* as a cultural rationale for the implementation of ALCN within NSW.

⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Our Land Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2012. [Particular attention was given to the value of language immersion nests at the pre-school level].

⁸ See *Key Terminology*, p.2.

⁹ OCHRE, loc. cit. [OCHRE is an acronym for Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment].

¹⁰ Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, op. cit., p.7.

2. FOUNDATIONS FRAMEWORK

2.1 Vision Statement

In the broadest sense any initiative aimed at continuing our Indigenous languages and cultures should be directed towards an ultimate vision centred on a future where ***Indigenous mother tongue and mother culture stand as sovereign within Indigenous home and community.*** This vision, however, tends to be thought of as more relevant to full or near full speech and culture practise contexts where mother tongues and mother cultures are better positioned to either hold-on or re-emerge as the cultural mainstay within Indigenous homes and communities. Despite this, as a macro vision its underpinning ideal usefully annunciates a deeply held global Indigenous aspiration to keep Indigenous mother tongues and mother cultures alive.

From a practical standpoint, however, in circumstances where our mother tongues and mother cultures have been severely eclipsed by coloniser languages and cultures, as is the case within NSW, it is more constructive to direct our language and culture aspirations toward discrete micro visions that usefully precondition the ultimate ideal of re-founding our languages as our first tongues and our cultures as our first living context against the variant levels of loss that language and culture decimation have imposed upon us. What emerges is a series of gradated vision statements centred on a future where:

LANGUAGE REVITALISATION	LANGUAGE RECLAMATION	LANGUAGE AWARENESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Indigenous mother tongue thoroughly dialects the everyday vernacular of Indigenous home and community.</i> • <i>Indigenous mother culture thoroughly contextualises Indigenous home and community.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Words and phrases of Indigenous mother tongue partially dialect the everyday vernacular of Indigenous home and community.</i> • <i>Indigenous mother culture partially informs Indigenous home and community.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Words of Indigenous mother tongue are heard in the everyday vernacular of Indigenous home and community.</i> • <i>Indigenous mother culture is present in Indigenous home and community.</i>

FIGURE 1 – A VISION FOR AWARENESS, RECLAMATION AND REVITALISATION CONTEXTS

In NSW where language and culture awareness, reclamation and revitalisation levels are prevalent these vision statements proffer an optimistic outlook, even when only limited amounts of language and culture knowledge are obtainable. This is because each level advocates an adapted more dynamic concept of cultural maintenance that transcends our use of language beyond the absolute of full speech and our practise of culture beyond the absolute of culture intactness. In synchronicity with this ALCN in NSW are visualizable as centred on a cultural future where:



FIGURE 2 – A VISION FOR ALCN IN NSW

2.2 Core Values

In NSW, our Aboriginal languages and cultures are inherently collective. They are collective in a way that continues to define us as having "...inter-being with the land, the sea, the sky and all life and geologic forms therein".¹¹ Through this collective inter-being we are enveloped within spiritualised cultural knowledge systems. Together collectivism and spiritualism are our core values. They enmesh our "...culture, identity and land together so powerfully that one is inseparable from the other".¹² As our core values collectivism and spiritualism compass a cultural worldview for our ALCN because:

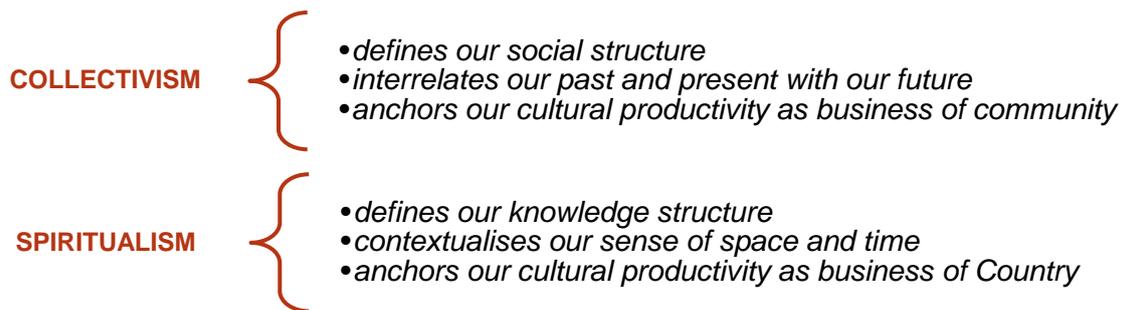


FIGURE 3 – CORE VALUES FOR ALCN IN NSW

2.3 Guiding Principles

If the cultural productivity of ALCN is to be secured and maintained as business of community and business of Country the everyday enterprise of ALCN must be underpinned by a cultural ethos that harmonises with our core values of collectivism and spiritualism. The vision for NSW ALCN articulated above will be achievable if these core values are extrapolated to guiding cultural principles that establish a

¹¹ ST Williams, *The Importance of Teaching and Learning Aboriginal Languages and Cultures*, Aboriginal Affairs, Surry Hills, NSW, 2011, p.ii

¹² *ibid.*

physical and psychological working environment that is manifestly Aboriginal. It is only through the application of guiding cultural principles that accord with spiritualism and collectivism that our ALCN will be able to function as cultural epicentres. The working ethos of our ALCN should thus align with:



FIGURE 4 – GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ALCN IN NSW

2.4 Goals

Inevitably, the start point for establishing community based ALCN within NSW will be determined by levels of language and culture loss. Given this, it makes sense to formulate interlinked language and culture goals together with holistic education goals for ALCN within NSW that align with the above micro visions set down for awareness, reclamation and revitalisation contexts. NSW ALCN goals need to strike a balance between a realistic appraisal of the present and a feasible outlook for the future. The following goals do not make an unworkable separation between language and culture. They do not rely upon achieving a full speech/full culture context, rather they capture the essence of maintenance as the way forward for achieving cultural self-renewal regardless of cultural knowledge discontinuities:

AWARENESS	
Language and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>To exhaust secondary historical sources to recover and document as much language and culture data as possible to accrue a basic corpus of cultural knowledge.</i> ➤ <i>To sufficiently expand this basic corpus of cultural knowledge to eventually enable progression to the more developed level of language and culture reclamation.</i>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>To translate this basic corpus of cultural knowledge into a learning programme that teaches awareness of mother tongue and ways of culture with the aim of fostering limited re-voicing of words of mother tongue and limited re-practise of ways of culture.</i> ➤ <i>To undertake continuous improvement of this learning programme in order to maintain a basic corpus of cultural knowledge, to secure on-going self-renewal of what has been recovered of mother tongue and mother culture, and to eventually build on this corpus of knowledge in order to progress wider application of mother tongue and ways of culture.</i>

RECLAMATION
<p>Language and Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>To record existing knowledge of language and culture and exhaust secondary historical sources to recover and document as much language and culture data as possible to accrue a sound corpus of cultural knowledge.</i> ➤ <i>To sufficiently expand this corpus of cultural knowledge to enable progression to the more advanced level of language and culture revitalisation.</i>
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>To translate this sound corpus of cultural knowledge into a learning programme that teaches a more developed understanding of mother tongue and ways of culture with the aim of fostering general re-voicing of words and phrases of mother tongue and general re-practise of ways of culture.</i> ➤ <i>To undertake continuous improvement of this learning programme in order to maintain a sound corpus of cultural knowledge, to secure on-going self-renewal of what has been recorded and recovered of mother tongue and mother culture, and to eventually build on this corpus of knowledge in order to progress a more complete application of mother tongue and ways of culture.</i>
REVITALISATION
<p>Language and Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>To record, collate and document existing knowledge of language and culture and supplement this through additional research of secondary historical sources to accrue a comprehensive corpus of cultural knowledge.</i> ➤ <i>To sufficiently consolidate this corpus of cultural knowledge to enable progression towards full or near full speech fluency and embedded cultural practise.</i>
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>To translate this comprehensive corpus of cultural knowledge into a moderated immersion learning programme that teaches re-voicing of mother tongue at a more complete level of dialogue in mother tongue and skilled re-practise of ways of culture.</i> ➤ <i>To undertake continuous improvement of this learning programme in order to maintain a comprehensive corpus of cultural knowledge, to secure on-going self-renewal of dialogue in mother tongue and practise in ways of culture, and to eventually build on this corpus of knowledge in order to progress full or near full speech fluency in mother tongue and expertise in ways of culture.</i>

TABLE 2 - PRIMARY GOALS FOR ALCN IN NSW

3. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE RIGHTS

It is important to acknowledge within this *Foundations Framework* that Indigenous cultural rights have been formally ratified through the international covenant 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples',¹³ which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 13th of September 2007 and formally endorsed by Australia on the 3rd of April 2009. Of the 46 articles stipulated in the UN declaration articles 11, 13 and 14 expressly assert rights directly relevant to us as we work to recover, re-voice and re-practise our mother tongues and mother cultures:

Article 11.1

Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

Article 13.1

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

Article 14.3

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.¹⁴

Alongside this, Australia's Commonwealth Government has affirmed a national commitment to our Indigenous Australian cultural rights through the 'Our Land Our Languages' report¹⁵ which was produced by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. In this report the Standing Committee formally recommended that we be given due constitutional acknowledgement of the status of our Indigenous mother tongues, and by assumption our Indigenous mother cultures:

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support Constitutional changes to include the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, as recommended by the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition for Indigenous Australians.¹⁶

¹³ United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as Resolution 61/295, 13 September, 2007
<<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>>

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. xviii.

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