



Research Report

# NSW Aboriginal Language Centres and Hubs





## Acknowledgement

The Aboriginal Languages Trust acknowledges the Custodians of the land on which we live, work and learn. We pay our respects to Aboriginal Peoples who have cared for this land and its Languages for time immemorial.

We acknowledge that the ongoing existence of Aboriginal Languages across New South Wales is a testament to Aboriginal Peoples' deep connections to Country and unique Knowledge of their lands.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we acknowledge the leaders of today who share the Languages of Country for the continuity of their Cultures.



## Cultural Advice

Aboriginal People are advised that this document may contain images or names of deceased people.

## Capitalisation

The Aboriginal Languages Trust capitalises words that have distinct meaning for Aboriginal People. We do this as a sign of respect and note that it may vary from capitalisation used in Standard Australian English. These words include: Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, Language, Culture, Community, Country, Custodians, Songlines, Lore/Law, Knowledges, Ancestors, Old People, Aboriginal People/s.



This report was produced by Thirriwirri for the Aboriginal Languages Trust. Research for this report was undertaken during 2023 and 2024.

Photos in this report were taken at the Language Centres and Hubs Network Days in 2024 by the Aboriginal Languages Trust.



## Artwork Narrative

### 'The Voice of Country'

By Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung artist Amy Allerton

At the beginning of creation, the land gave birth to Language, a living force, spreading out far and wide, connecting us to our creator, our Ancestors, our Country and our Culture.

The voice of Country speaks to us through the water, the earth, the stars and the spirits of those past, present and future. The winds of Language travel through each tribe and Nation, it is diverse and yet it is one, bringing strength, Knowledge and healing.

"The Voice of Country" tells the intertwined story of Identity and sovereignty. It represents the foundation of Language which is ingrained in Culture, Community and Country across NSW, and speaks of the unyielding resilience of the world's oldest living Culture. It shows the inseparable nature of the physical, intellectual and spiritual manifestations of Language that shape the identity of Aboriginal Peoples and connects them to each other and the land.

"The Voice of Country" is an invitation for all peoples to come together in partnership to share in the dawn of a new, enriched and thriving future, where Language is heard, people are seen, connection is strengthened, and Culture is celebrated.

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## SECTION 1

# Executive Summary

This report proposes ways in which government, organisations and Communities can support the establishment, growth and sustainability of Aboriginal Language Centres and Hubs (ALC&Hs) to revitalise NSW Aboriginal Languages.

Using research including consultations with nominated NSW ALC&Hs and interstate and international Indigenous Language Centres, information was gathered around the challenges and barriers they face, factors that contribute to their longevity, as well as opportunities that could support Aboriginal Language revitalisation in NSW.

Research shows that over the last few decades there has been a growing acknowledgement and interest in revitalisation of Aboriginal Languages. Across the state, ALC&Hs have been established, with more emerging and others wanting to grow. The demand from Aboriginal Communities to learn Language is exceeding the capacity of new and emerging ALC&Hs. During the Aboriginal Languages Trust's (the Trust) consultation to develop their *Strategic Plan 2022-27*, Aboriginal Communities expressed a need for more ALC&Hs to address the urgency of Language revitalisation.

Key factors for ALC&H sustainability and impact became apparent throughout the research which included long-term and adequate resourcing, ALC&H capacity building and a whole of government coordination effort to deliver on the *NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*; *National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Target 16)*; *Voices of Country: Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032*; and *Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place*.



Other elements identified that contribute to sustainable ALC&Hs include being Community-led, owned and governed, access to Country, access to archival resources and awareness of Aboriginal Culture and value of Language to the broader NSW community.

There are also some common challenges and barriers for ALC&Hs to implementing their Language plans including access to resources (sustainable funding, lack of expertise, Language and Knowledge holders, archival records), limited capacity of ALC&Hs to meet Community needs and allocated time to do strategic and succession planning. The apparent insufficient resourcing effort from government to revitalise Aboriginal Languages in NSW risks the further contributing to their endangerment or loss.

Recommendations to support ALC&H sustainably have been made for the Trust's consideration. These include providing opportunities for ALC&Hs to network and have a greater say on the policies and priorities of government and ways to support ALC&Hs through greater capacity building resources.



## SECTION 2

# Recommendations

### Voice - ALC&Hs having a greater say

1

Create avenues or mechanisms for ALC&Hs to have a say on policies and priorities impacting their work.

ALC&Hs expressed a desire to influence policy on issues impacting their work at the local, state and national levels, including in the areas of education, land and Country and tourism.

ALC&Hs noted that there are multiple policies, strategies and priorities for government regarding Language revitalisation which can be difficult to understand if and how they are aligned, dependent or inter-dependent. It is challenging for ALC&Hs to understand government's responsibilities and to be able to hold government accountable to their obligations and commitments.





## Collaboration and Networking

2

Support ALC&Hs to gather and network on a regular basis on areas of common interests and priorities:

- a. For collaboration, networking, peer support and promotion opportunities.
- b. To enable ALC&Hs to develop coordinated and strategic comment, and have a say on policies and priorities at a local/regional, state and national level.

The way that ALC&Hs come together will likely evolve as they determine ways that will best meet their needs and priorities. ALC&Hs expressed an interest in being supported by one another; influencing policy on areas including Language and Culture activities and teaching in schools and TAFE, government funding priorities, how to establish career and training pathways in Languages; and problem solving and ideas exchange on areas of mutual interest.

Initially, until there are firm arrangements in place to allow ALC&Hs to gather under their own accord or through an independent mechanism, the Trust will need to arrange, and potentially resource, the networking events. Concurrently ALC&Hs can collaborate and network with one another as required.

Models identified during the consultation process include:

- Arrange and fund the networking events directly, with Trust staff performing secretariat duties, coordinating and supporting ALC&Hs to action any outcomes from the discussions.
- Establish an agreement with the NSW ALC&Hs to second staff 'in-kind' to the network to allow ALC&Hs to arrange and direct how the networking events operate. This would enable independent action but requires a level of capacity by ALC&Hs to be able to lead this work.

## Resourcing

3

Support NSW ALC&Hs to access recurrent program and operational funding to sustain critical Community-led Languages work through various strategies including:

- a. Establish a mechanism for cross government coordination for Aboriginal Language revitalisation funding programs so that investment is strategic, efficient and supports sustainable positive outcomes for Aboriginal Communities. This includes the identification of recurrent program and operational funding.
- b. Advocate to the Commonwealth Government for their Indigenous Languages and Arts Program to recognise and fund all Community-led ALC&Hs in NSW. This program is one of very few existing recurrent funding sources for ALC&Hs (only four ALC&Hs operating in NSW are currently recognised under the ILA and eligible for multi-year funding).
- c. Advocate for sustainable and adequate allocation of NSW Government funding invested in Language revitalisation through Closing the Gap Target 16, underpinned by the Trust's research priority area one, "Setting a Strong Foundation, Impact of Aboriginal Language use and revival" including evidence based on social return on investment.
- d. Seek opportunities to create a 'third space' to advocate for what success looks like in terms of 'Community-led Languages revitalisation' for both Aboriginal Communities and government.
- e. Support ALC&Hs to diversify their funding sources including philanthropic, self-reliant and corporate by:
  - i. establishing strategic relationships with funders and facilitate connections with ALC&Hs.
  - ii. support ALC&Hs to raise awareness of their work and impact to attract funding.
  - iii. support ALC&Hs in project design and management, grant and proposal writing capacity building to successfully apply for funding.
  - iv. Develop, in partnership with ALC&Hs, business plans and activation strategies to support income generating activities.

ALC&Hs have developed and delivered Language activities to their Communities with most of their funding received from state and federal governments. A whole of government, coordinated and flexible approach to funding ALC&Hs is necessary to enable the intended outcomes, for both Community and government, to be achieved.

Resourcing was highlighted as a major barrier to ALC&H sustainability. ALC&Hs require recurrent program and operational funding to better meet the urgent and critical effort realistically required to re-awaken and revitalise First Nations Languages and build a critical mass of Language speakers to First Nations Languages. Recurrent or longer-term funding will lessen the burden that ALC&Hs face in managing multiple ad hoc, short term funding sources and enable more strategic funding strategies to be pursued. Operational funding will increase the organisational capacity to attract, retain and develop staff, manage operations while delivering programs, and to be forward looking, strategic and able to plan for and enact funding and income generating strategies.

## Strategic and Community Language planning

4

**Resource ALC&H strategic planning and Community Language planning processes to enable ALC&Hs to set and implement strategies to build sustainability.**

Strategic and Community Language planning is a way to clarify an ALC&H's strategic vision, needs, priorities and plans for action and growth. This planning is also a foundation for determining an ALC&H's intended outcomes, for measuring and reporting impact and attracting investment that is responsive to ALC&H needs and aspirations. ALC&Hs seek to better understand planning processes and purposes and how these can be tailored to their circumstances and needs. ALC&Hs also require resourcing and support given they do not have sufficient time or capacity to undertake this work and seek a nuanced approach to this that encompasses Trust staff providing direct assistance (e.g. facilitating planning processes) and/or direct funding to ALC&Hs for planning capacity and expertise.

## Capacity Building and succession planning



Support ALC&Hs to build their capacity for now and for tomorrow including:

- a. Mapping ALC&H training needs, training courses and training pathways to support career development. Examine barriers to training, including cost of courses and limited locations of training and develop strategies to overcome these.
- b. Map and identify Language career pathways and examine the establishment of Languages workforce salaries awards, including an Aboriginal Language Teachers award.
- c. Examine opportunities to support paid Language traineeships.

There is an urgent and growing need for Language teachers with Aboriginal Communities' growing desire to revitalise and learn Languages outpacing the number of existing and emerging Language teachers. Resource constraints restrict the ability of ALC&Hs to attract and retain qualified and sufficient staffing, and their ability to undertake strategic and workforce planning to develop their existing and future workforce. ALC&Hs also identified the need for clearer training and staff development pathways, to remove barriers to training (including cost, travel, juggling work/family commitments) and incentives for Language workers to stay in critical Community roles (award salaries, paid learning, traineeships).



## Access to archival records

- 6 Promote and encourage the use of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) protocols when collection agencies and libraries are engaging with Aboriginal Communities in the process of accessing archival records.
- 7 Establish/strengthen relationships with key collection agencies.
- 8 Facilitate partnerships between ALC&Hs and collection agencies.

Accessing archival records posed a challenge for Aboriginal people wanting to investigate or use existing resources to revitalise Language. ALC&Hs and research raised several aspects that were problematic:

- Knowing where to go to for guidance on existing Language records.
- Navigating the process to access archival records.
- Accessing records in a Culturally appropriate and safe manner including trauma support.

## Raise awareness

- 9 Raise awareness and continue to promote the benefits of Aboriginal Languages to government and the wider NSW community.

Understanding the context and richness of Aboriginal Cultures is important for non-Aboriginal people. Recognising the significance of Aboriginal Languages and Cultures as a part of Australia's national identity and heritage can play a role in the progress for reconciliation.

## SECTION 3

# Introduction

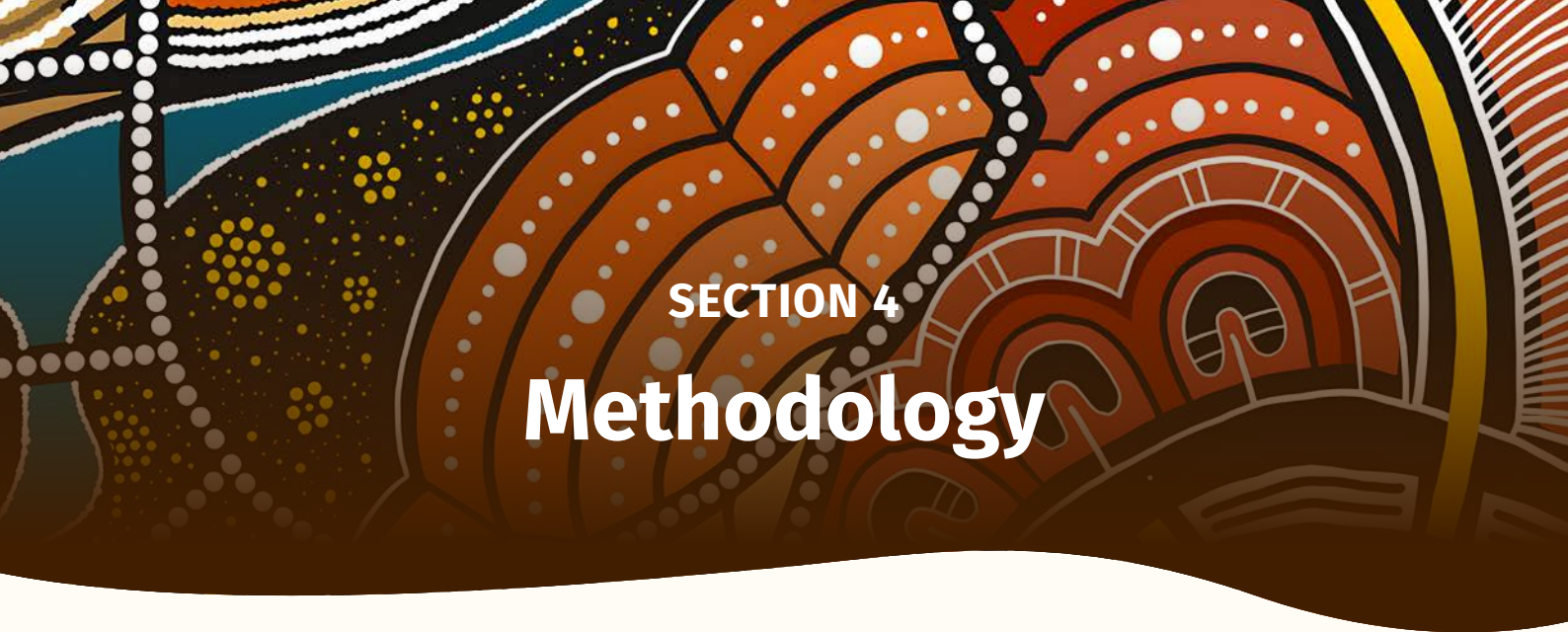
The *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* (the Act) commenced in 2020 with an objective to “promote, reawaken, nurture and grow Aboriginal Languages across NSW.” The Aboriginal Languages Trust (the Trust), established under the Act, provides focused, coordinated and sustained effort for Aboriginal Language activities at local, regional and State levels. The Trust is also the lead NSW Government agency for the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* Target 16 that seeks a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages being spoken by 2031.

In 2021, during the Trust’s consultation with Aboriginal Communities in NSW, Aboriginal people voiced a need to establish more sustainably funded Community-led Aboriginal Language Centres or Hubs with a recommendation that “the Trust should look to models of Language centres that work well and seek to replicate these” (Aboriginal Languages Trust Consultation Outcomes Report, 2022, p.16).

To progress these recommendations, the Trust engaged Thirriwirri to develop a research paper and an ALC&H Community Handbook to support Aboriginal Community Languages aspirations in NSW. This research paper was to:

- Report on insights into NSW Aboriginal Community needs/experiences with ALC&Hs
- Outline the different types of ALC&Hs including the current investment in ALC&Hs in NSW
- Report on challenges and barriers to ALC&Hs success
- Report on local Communities, regions and Language Groups currently without access to Language hub support
- Report on factors that contribute to Language hub success based on NSW, national and international experiences and evidence
- Provide an inclusive ‘Language Centre’ definition
- Recommend how governments, organisations and Communities can provide support to overcome current challenges faced

This research paper covers these elements.



## SECTION 4

# Methodology

In undertaking this project Thirriwirri was guided by the principles of ensuring primacy of Community voice, recognition of Aboriginal Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property and data sovereignty, inclusivity and transparency.

This research paper is the output of both a desktop review and consultations with Language Centres and Hubs.

### Desktop Review

The desktop review was undertaken using material that fell within the following categories:

Relevant research covering the definition of ALC&H, factors for effective and sustainable Language activities, challenges, and barriers, ALC&H governance models, functions, and funding opportunities and challenges.

Past Community consultation results provided by the Trust to take account of Community perspectives on the needs, aspirations, and experiences with ALC&Hs.

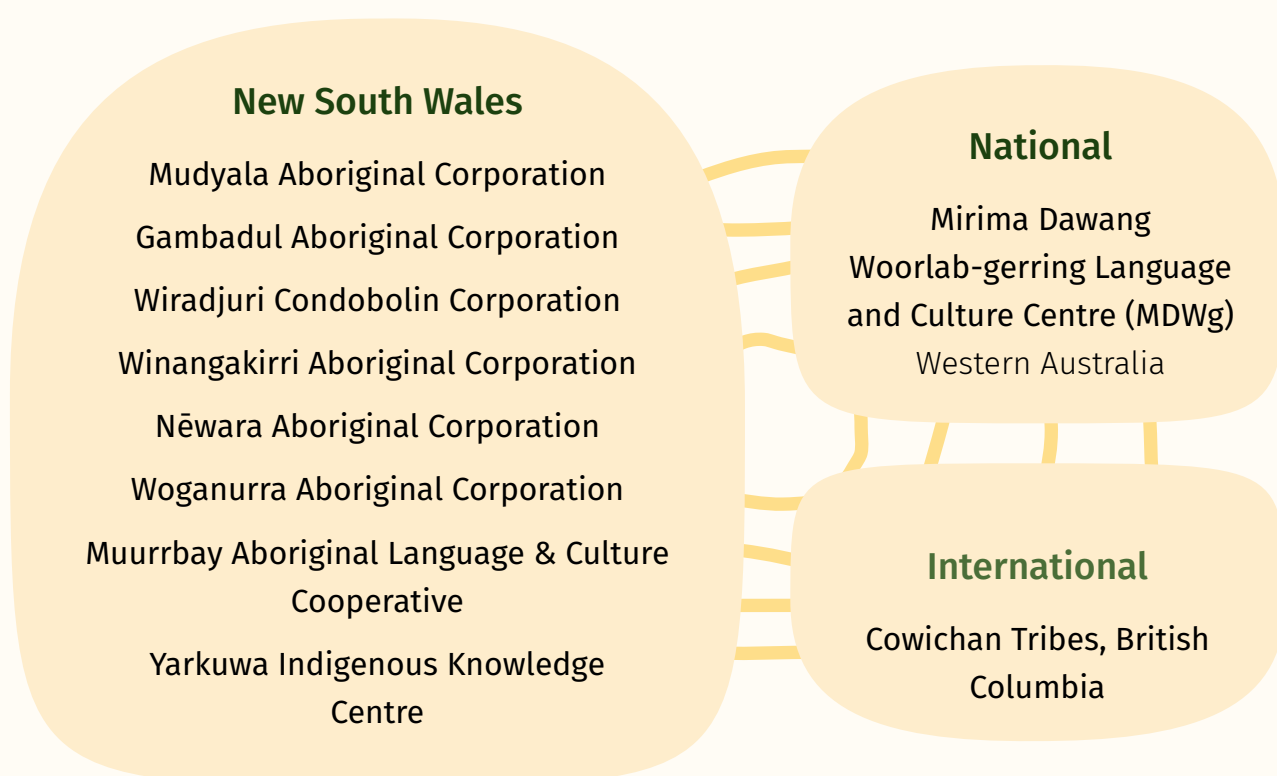
Relevant policy and program frameworks at NSW state, national and international levels.

Detailed technical resources and documents that support Aboriginal Language practice and services, including how to establish and operate an Aboriginal Language Centre.

Information about existing ALC&Hs operating in NSW and other jurisdictions.

## Consultations

The Trust nominated nine NSW ALC&Hs that were known to be Community-led and owned organisations delivering Language activities related to their specific Language groups, to participate in the project. All but one of these ALC&Hs participated. A number of interstate ALC&Hs and overseas First Nations-led Language centres were invited to participate in the project as examples of successful ALC&Hs operating nationally and internationally, with one organisation from Western Australia and one from Canada agreeing to participate. The ALC&Hs consulted are listed below:



Guiding questions were provided to ALC&Hs before each consultation for transparency, efficiency and consistency. Thirriwirri staff followed Aboriginal Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols and allowed ALC&Hs to steer the conversation, sharing knowledge and experience as they felt comfortable within the time available. Information shared in this report that identifies a particular ALC&H has been done so with that ALC&H's consent.

During this project, an opportunity emerged for the Trust to facilitate a gathering of the participating ALC&Hs to network in person, and to share experiences and learnings of their respective Language journeys. This event, held in May at the Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation, Condobolin, provided further information to inform this report and the ALC&H Community Handbook.



## SECTION 5

# Results / Findings

### Policy context

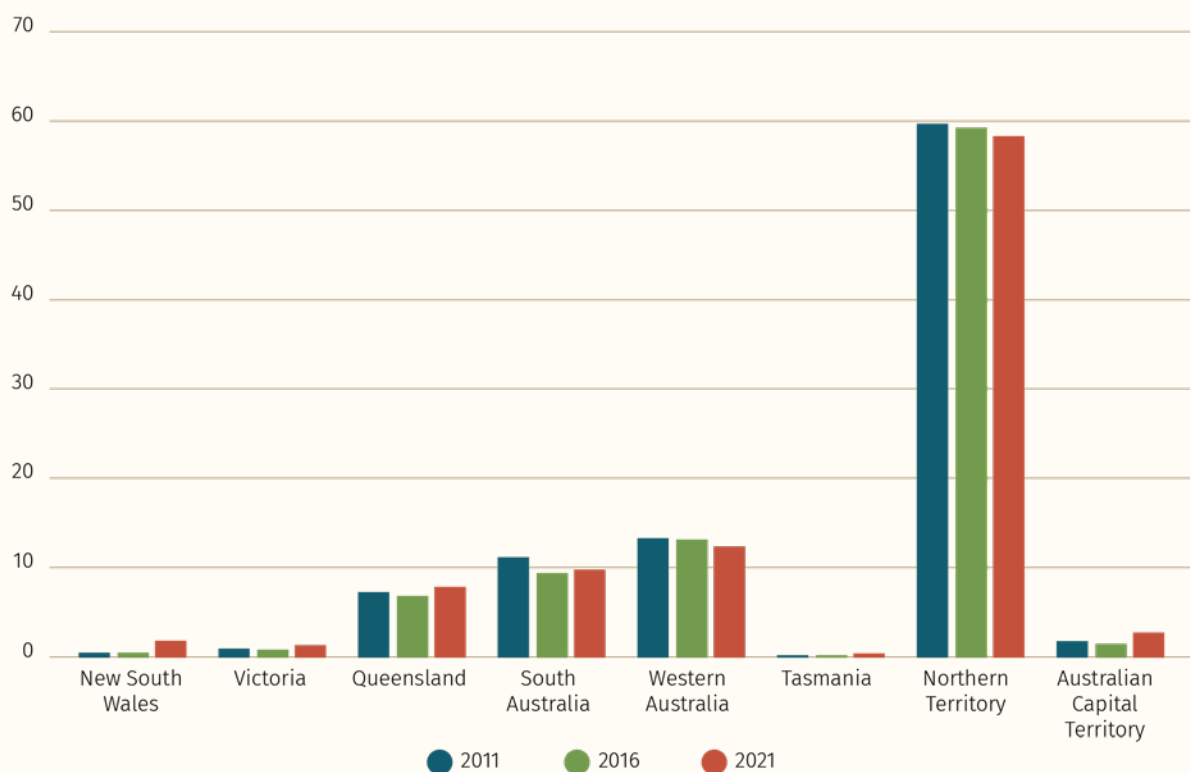
According to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 2024), there were over 250 First Nations Languages spoken in Australia in 1788; 120 Languages were spoken in 2016 and in 2019, approximately 90 per cent of First Nations Languages were considered endangered.

It is difficult to be accurate about the status of Aboriginal Languages in NSW, not least because of the differing measures of strength and vitality used. These measures include but aren't necessarily limited to, the number of Language varieties (traditional, new or "Englishes") (Angelo et al., 2019, p.13), number of fluent speakers, number of generational speakers, fluency by all age groups. A further challenge is the reliance on self-reporting, for example when responding to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census and National Indigenous Languages survey.



The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) found that, while NSW had reported relatively low use of Aboriginal Language at home compared to other states, there has been a slight rise since 2011 as shown in the table below.

Graph 1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons who spoke an Aboriginal Language or Torres Strait Islander Language by State/Territory, 2011 - 2021



Source: Australia Bureau of Statistics, Language Statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2021

Regardless of how Language status is assessed, research indicates that Aboriginal Languages are “under threat” and in a “critical and precarious state” (National Indigenous Languages Report, 2020, p.9; International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group & Australian Government, 2023, p.12) and therefore a strategic and purposeful effort is needed to maintain the continued use and teaching of those Languages.

Both academic and anecdotal research shows that Language is a pivotal source of Cultural connection and identity and the absence of such in Aboriginal Communities is detrimental to Community wellbeing. Learning and teaching Aboriginal Languages is shown to have broader benefits for participants than just speaking Language (Sivak et al., 2019; Lowe & Walsh, 2009). For example, beyond the skill of speaking Language, the sentiment of knowing and understanding Language can also play a part in “strengthening identity and a sense of belonging; empowering Indigenous people by increasing self-esteem and a sense of pride; and improving communication between Communities, families and across generations” (Sivak et al. 2019, p.2).

The *NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* is the first statute in Australia to recognise the importance of Aboriginal Languages and commit a government to the reawakening, nurturing and growing of Aboriginal Languages, and to acknowledge Aboriginal Custodianship of Languages.

The Trust, established under the Act and governed by a First Nations Board, provides a focused, coordinated and sustained effort for Aboriginal Languages activities at local, regional, and State levels (Aboriginal Languages Trust, 2024). The *Aboriginal Languages Trust Strategic Plan 2022-27* (2022) reflects the perspectives, needs and aspirations of Communities and sets out the areas the Trust will focus on to support all NSW Aboriginal Languages to be strong and healthy. Focus areas include actions to nurture and grow Languages, connect Communities, to celebrate and promote Communities and support sustainable futures.

At the national and state levels, Target 16 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (2020) seeks that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures and Languages are strong, supported and flourishing. The Australian and NSW Governments, as parties to the Agreement, acknowledge that strong First Nations Cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Key actions in NSW include that Aboriginal Communities define what makes their Languages ‘strong and healthy’ and determine the baseline to measure progress against this outcome; Aboriginal peoples and Communities have better access to archive materials for Languages revitalisation; the establishment and operation of place-based Aboriginal Language Centres is investigated; and



Aboriginal Communities have better access to Country for Languages learning and education. The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) is the peak organisation leading NSW Aboriginal Community participation in Target 16.

In December 2023, the Australian Government introduced *Revive*, its new National Cultural policy (Department of Infrastructure, 2023) which includes a strategic priority of First Nations First: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia’s arts and Culture. Under this policy the Australian Government, through the Office for the Arts, plans to introduce Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) legislation to protect First Nations ICIP (Australian Government, n.d.).

At an international level, UNESCO’s International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-23 provides a ten-year action plan to drive action to preserve, revitalise and celebrate First Peoples Languages. Australia’s national Directions Group, “established to shape Australia’s involvement in UNESCO’s International Decade of Languages 2022-2032...as well as provide strategic policy direction and work on key projects” in partnership with the Australian Government, has developed an action plan in response to UNESCO’s Global Call for Action. (International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group & Australian Government, 2023).



## Definition of ALC&Hs relevant to NSW

There is no standard definition of an ALC&H. The term itself is narrow, and not reflective of the way Aboriginal Community-led organisations describe themselves and the expanse of work they do. The ALC&Hs consulted as part of the ALC&H research paper and Community Handbook project have said that each organisation and Community need to decide how they are defined.

The Australian Government, through the Office for the Arts' Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) Program, recognises a network of 24 [Indigenous Language Centres](#) (ILCs) that it provides funding to, but does not define ILCs. The Australian Government recognises only four NSW based ILCs, whereas this project identifies many more NSW ALC&Hs on the basis that they are Aboriginal Community-led organisations undertaking Languages work in their own Language groups (see Table 1). It is noted that one of the NSW based ILCs recognised by the Australian Government – Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre (Miromaa) – is a Community-led organisation with a primary focus to provide software and training services in support of Community Language work rather than having a direct role in Community-led local Languages work, and hence was not interviewed for this project.

From the literature alone it is difficult to discern the reason for the Commonwealth's recognition of ALC&Hs other than historical funding arrangements – i.e. organisations that have received Commonwealth funding for Languages activities in the past.



Table 1. NSW-based ILCs and ALC&Hs that took part in this project

Please note that this is not a list of all Aboriginal Community-led organisations undertaking Language work in NSW.

	ALC&H/ILC	Language Groups
<b>NSW-based Project participant</b>	Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation	Yaygirr
	Gambadul Aboriginal Corporation	Gomeroi
	Winangakirri Aboriginal Corporation	Ngiyampaa
	Nēwara Aboriginal Corporation	Anaiwan
	Woganurra Aboriginal Corporation	Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaaliyaay, Murrawarri and Gamilaraay/ Gomeroi
	Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre (Yarkuwa)	Wamba Wamba/Wemba Wemba
<b>Both NSW-based Project participant &amp; Nationally recognised</b>	Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative (Muurrbay)	Gumbaynggirr, Gathang, Bundjalung, Darkinyung, Dhanggati, Yaygirr
	Regional Enterprise Development Institute Ltd (REDI.E)	Parkantyi/Barkindji, Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan, Wayilwan, Muruwari
	Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation	Wiradjuri, Wemba Wemba, Yorta Yorta, Nari Nari
<b>Nationally recognised</b>	Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre (Miromaa)	Based on Awabakal Country

Overall, this highlights that the Trust might define ALC&Hs more broadly when compared to how the Australian Government currently recognises ILCs.

Firstly, for a NSW context, an ALC&H works to service the needs of their own Communities in their own Languages. In other words, ALC&Hs are organisations working in and with their own Language groups and Nations they are connected to. They may include specific geographic locations, with work only being conducted on Country or could be operated in a way where people can participate based on their Language and Cultural affiliation – regardless of where they reside. Cultural affiliation and authority come from the Languages groups that the ALC&H has connection to. This would not necessarily restrict the ALC&H from making learning and Cultural activities available to people from other Nations, or non-Aboriginal people.

The second distinction is that the Languages work of ALC&Hs are tangible activities undertaken within their Language/s Community/ies, which could include, but not be limited to: revitalisation, learning, expression and celebration. There are some exceptions for an ALC&H working outside their core Language group(s). In the instance of Murrumbidgee, they expanded to a regional Language Centre where they support other Languages, alongside researchers, linguists and Community to develop their own local Languages resources.

Considering our consultation with ALC&Hs and a scan of Aboriginal Community-led organisations involved in Language work in other jurisdictions, a definition of ALC&Hs would need to include:

- Being Community-led and owned.
- Having a defined Language/s as a focus of its work, with Cultural affiliation and authority coming from the Languages groups that the ALC&H sits within or has connection to.
- Undertaking tangible activities for the Language group/s it serves. This could involve a broad range of functions and activities including Language revival, repatriation of Languages materials to Community, teaching, development of Language teachers, Language and Cultural expression, development of resources, networking between Language groups, Community Language practitioners etc. Such activities, and the organisation structure that supports it, would be determined by Communities.



## Status of NSW ALC&Hs

The locations and Language groups covered by ALC&Hs in NSW that participated in this project are shown on the map on page 28 and in Table 1 (above). The Language groups covered by those NSW ALC&Hs reflect their physical locations and Language groups supported, noting some ALC&Hs, for example Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation, REDI.E and Muurrbay take a regional approach covering multiple Language groups. The Trust has included the development of a NSW Languages map in their *Five-Year Research Agenda* (2023) which should assist in identifying Language groups and their demographics.

The journey of each ALC&H is unique and reflects their own experiences and Community needs. While Languages work can be very healing, the lasting impacts of colonisation including disruption, dispossession, forced resettlement and the denial of Languages and Cultures, brings up trauma and loss which people must navigate as they go about their critically important Languages work. The research reinforces how this still impacts connection to Country and the endangerment of Languages (Hobson et al., 2018) and subsequently shapes the pathways Communities take in reawakening Culture and Languages.

### Functions

Overall ALC&Hs tend to take a holistic approach to their work, recognising the interconnectedness between Language and Culture. Various factors influence the scope and diversity of ALC&H activities including resources (funding), capacity (staff or volunteer time), access to Language resources including records and Language speakers and operational support including premises and supplies for activities. Examples of activities undertaken by ALC&Hs include Languages teaching in various forms, including social groups that incorporate Language in their sessions, formal classes, homework centres; Language revival; repatriation of Languages material to Communities; Cultural tours and camps; hosting an online platform for Language contributions from Community to share and learn; development of Language teachers and the development of resources etc.



## Governance

Overall, the purpose of ALC&Hs guides their governance structure and how they form as an entity. This is also influenced in part by government and philanthropic funding eligibility requirements that expect grant recipients to be incorporated, or a Local Aboriginal Land Council, and only in rare instances, sole traders. As such the NSW ALC&H governance and entity structures vary and include:

Registered with Office of Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (2024) (CATSI Act) (Nēwara, Mudyala, Gambadul, Winangakirri, Woganurra). The benefits of this arrangement can include that the Registrar “supports and regulates corporations by advising on how to incorporate, training directors, members and key staff in good governance, ensuring compliance with the law and, intervening when needed.” (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, n.d). This can assist with capacity building for ALC&H staff and governance, although in practice it has been flagged by some ALC&Hs that the level of support available does not meet governance support needs. It is also free to register, and the corporation’s rule book can integrate Aboriginal customs and traditions.

Incorporated under the (Commonwealth) *Corporations Act 2001* (Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation and Yarkuwa) which is administered by Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).

A [reference sheet](#) co-authored by ORIC and ASIC comparing the Corporations Act and CATSI Act is at Appendix A.

Incorporated as a co-operative under *NSW Co-operatives (adoption of national law) Act 2012*, with member-owned business structures (Muurrbay) where members have voting rights. Limited liability applies.

Registered as an Aboriginal owned and controlled not for profit company with ASIC (REDI.E). This type of organisation has reporting obligations to both ASIC (as a company) and Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) (for charitable status), including annual reporting, and reporting of some organisational changes e.g. name or deregistering (ASIC, 2014). Limited liability applies.

Many ALC&Hs are operated as charities so must be compliant with the *Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commissions Act 2012*. Importantly, there are some exemptions to the Corporations Act 2001 that apply to an ALC&H registered as a charity.

NSW ALC&Hs (as part of this research) and Communities (through past NSW Community Languages consultations) have said that Community support and endorsement of Languages work is of paramount importance. ALC&Hs in NSW hold expectations that they must follow Cultural protocols in undertaking their Languages activities. Communities in NSW expressed that those involved in Language revitalisation and teaching would first need to obtain endorsement by Elders and Language speakers from the relevant Language group and Community (Aboriginal Languages Trust Consultations Outcome Report, 2021). These expectations are reflected in the governance arrangements of NSW ALC&Hs.

The majority of NSW ALC&Hs are governed by Aboriginal Boards or Board of Directors. Governing board memberships include Community members and, in some instances, non-Aboriginal subject matter experts. Some ALC&Hs, such as Muurrbay, have a membership base with different participatory roles and membership requirements ALC&H, such as mandatory participation in their programs. Other examples of Community governance mechanisms include establishment of Elders Advisory Groups and Language Reference Groups (Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation).



Table 2. Some ALC&Hs in NSW and the Languages they support are outlined in the table below.

ALC&H	Base Location	Region	Language Groups
Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation	Clarence Valley	Northern NSW Clarence Valley region	Yaygirr
Gambadul Aboriginal Corporation	Tamworth	Northern NSW	Gomeroi
Winangakirri Aboriginal Corporation	Mawonga Station (IPA listed)	Central West NSW	Ngiyampaa
Nēwara Aboriginal Corporation	Armidale	Armidale region	Anaiwan
Woganurra Aboriginal Corporation	Lightning Ridge	Northern NSW	Yuwaalaraay/ Yuwaaliyaay, Murrawarri and Gamilaraay/Gomeroi
Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre (Yarkuwa)	Deniliquin	Riverina NSW	Wamba Wamba/Wemba Wemba
Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative (Muurrbay)	Nambucca Heads	North Coast NSW	Gumbaynggirr, Wonnarua, Bundjalung, Darkinjung, Dhanggati, Gathang, Yaygirr
Regional Enterprise Development Institute Ltd (REDI.E)	Dubbo	Murdi Paaki	Parkantyi/Barkindji, Ngiyampaa Wangawaypuwan, Wayilwan, Muruwari
Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation	Condobolin	Central NSW	Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba/Wamba Wemba & Nari Nari

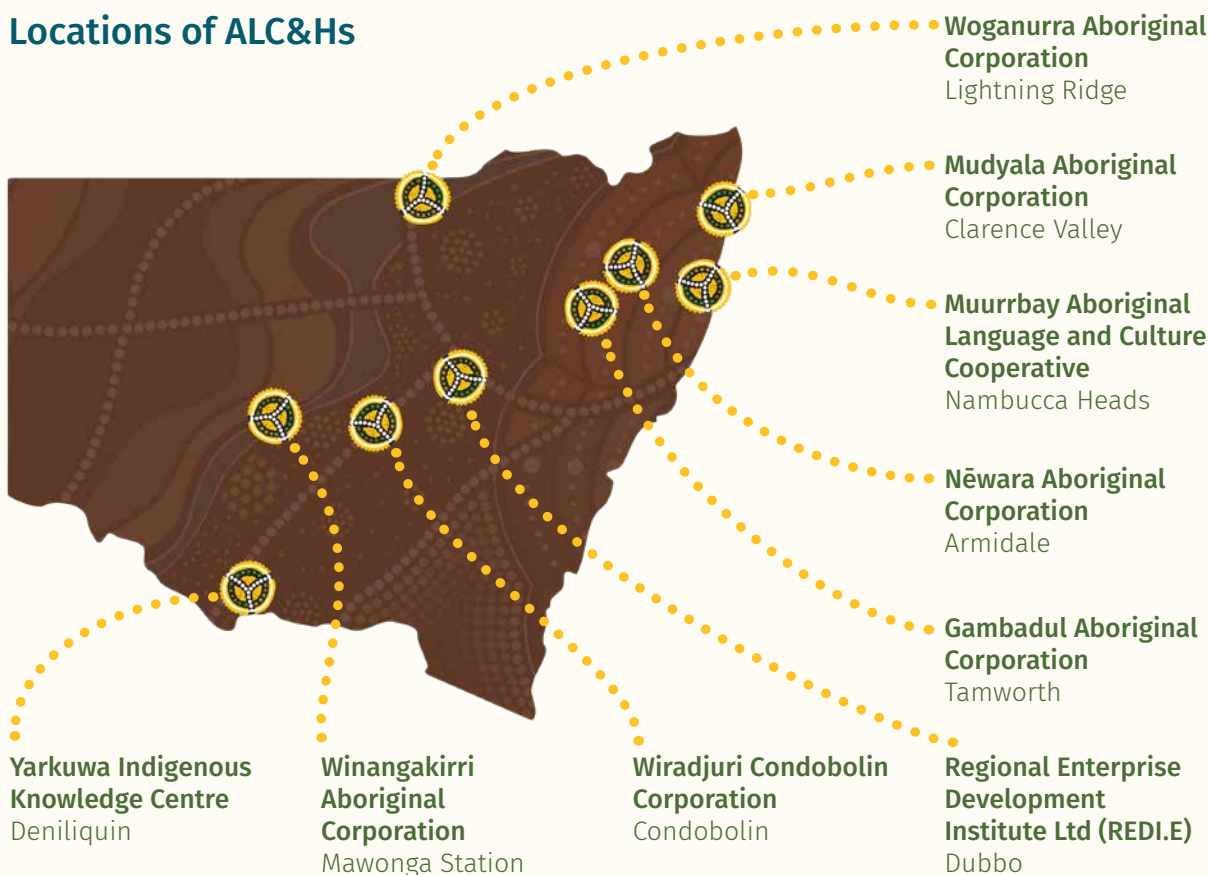
## Gaps

The AIATSIS Languages database Austlang lists 117 Languages or dialects in NSW, yet only a small fraction of these are being supported in their revitalisation. Many factors contribute to this, including no or very limited access to Language resources such as Language speakers and Knowledge holders or archival records, and/or Communities themselves not being in a position or ready to commence, drive or participate in Language activities.

In geographical terms, there are obvious gaps in ALC&H coverage in the state's far north west, far west and south coast (see below map). However, there are many more Communities who do not currently have access to an ALC&H for their Language, even if an ALC&H is located nearby. Based on the above figures, less than 20% of the state's Languages currently have ALC&H support.

To some extent this project unpacks the current status and gaps of Community-led Languages work in NSW and seeks to identify things that work or could be replicated to extend the coverage of Language revitalisation across the State, while also providing practical information to support Communities via the Hub and ALC&H Community Handbook. This work will likely be supported by the Trust's *Five-Year Research Agenda 2023-28* (p. 10) that identifies the need to investigate the "demographic information about the Aboriginal Languages of NSW" as part of building a strong foundation and evidence base for the Trust to strategically support Aboriginal Languages in NSW.

## Locations of ALC&Hs



# Challenges, barriers and opportunities for ALC&Hs

## Lack of sustainable or sufficient funding

Over recent decades, there has been a growing interest in Aboriginal Language revitalisation in NSW and Australia. But even though government's investment has progressively increased, it falls short of the urgent and critical resources Communities realistically require to re-awaken and revitalise their Languages and increase the number of Language speakers to a critical mass to sustain those Languages.

Government funding to NSW ALC&Hs is mainly short to medium (12 months to 2 years) term, but ALC&Hs need long-term investment (more than 4 years) to develop and deliver on their Community's Language aspirations. This is particularly crucial for ALC&Hs to be strategic, build sustainability and maximise their impact, efficiency and effectiveness.

We heard, and the research shows, that many ALC&Hs rely on funding from multiple sources and consequentially face compliance and reporting requirements/burdens that stretch their already limited administrative capacity. Also, ALC&Hs run the risk of being pulled towards the priorities of funding bodies and must carefully consider how the objectives of various grants programs align with their ALC&H's own goals and needs. Information about current funding for Aboriginal Languages is at Appendix C.

Many ALC&Hs operate through the generosity of Community volunteers, and often rely on a small number of Knowledge holders. This creates risks to the sustainability of ALC&Hs as having critical activities delivered by unpaid roles masks the extent of effort and funding required to revitalise and grow Languages. It also puts Community members at risk of burn-out as people juggle paid roles and seek to balance their Community and family roles and responsibilities.

Operational funding has been identified as a need, separate to program funding. While the Australian Government offers operational funding via the Indigenous Languages and Arts Program to a selected network of 24 ALC&Hs across the nation, only four are based in NSW.

For some ALC&Hs who have the means, opportunity and capability, income generating activities create an alternate source of funds that can be invested back into the ALC&H. Although, this is reportedly, a relatively minor contribution to the overall resourcing required to operate an ALC&H.

## Who teaches and learns Language

There are differing opinions about who should teach or learn Aboriginal Languages. There is a view that only Aboriginal people should be able to teach their Language, so the connection and Custodianship of that Language remains strong. There is hesitation to include non-Aboriginal people to teach or learn for fear of Languages being ‘taken out of the hands’ of Aboriginal people (Tugwell, 2024). Further, where Language is not taught on Country but in institutional classrooms e.g. schools, universities and TAFEs, there is a concern about a loss of Aboriginal ownership and control (Aboriginal Languages Trust Consultation Outcomes Report, 2022). ALC&Hs also raised concern about greater focus and resourcing going into Languages learning in universities and schools than into Community and grass roots level activities.

Conversely, we heard from ALC&Hs, and found in research, that more often Aboriginal people are open to sharing Language with non-Aboriginal people in the spirit of celebrating Aboriginal Language and Culture and broadening understanding and appreciation of Culture, particularly for younger children (Hoger, 2023). There is also a sentiment that the more people who can speak it, the less chance there is of ‘losing it’ (again) (Tugwell, 2024).

There was a general sentiment amongst the participating ALC&Hs to make learning and other ALC&H activities available for all Aboriginal people, whether from theirs or another Language group. Whether or not non-Aboriginal people have access is a factor of consideration for each ALC&H. Some ALC&Hs deliver activities to people living off Country – including teaching in the form of an online program, virtual classes, applications on devices or access to video



and audio files hosted on a platform by an ALC&H. Further, where Aboriginal Community members want to participate but are unable to afford it, they should be able to without charge, regardless of the course being offered in a formal (e.g. TAFE NSW) or informal setting.

We also heard that in some cases, ALC&Hs experience a reluctance from school principals and administrators to have Languages taught in schools. Some reasons for this could include a lack of appreciation for Language within the broader community and competing priorities for the school to resource the design and implementation of Language activities.

### **Differing views on what success looks like**

There is a lack of general community awareness and appreciation of Languages, along with a misalignment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal value systems in terms of what is a meaningful and beneficial program or initiative for local Communities. Currently, some funding guidelines don't allow the span of innovation and ideology needed for applicants, who instead need to find ways to 'fit' their concepts within program guidelines and eligibility criteria. Not having mutually agreed definitions of 'success' or what constitutes a positive outcome is a barrier to Communities accessing government or philanthropic funding.

Another significant factor is misaligned timeframes. Imposed expectations of timeframes and measurable outcomes on ALC&Hs within a grant program cycle can be unreasonable in the context of revitalising Language. For example, significant time and energy is required to develop Language speakers who can then teach Language. One ALC&H indicated that their Community has been working to build the Language workforce for decades. Re-learning and teaching Language as well as building the Language workforce takes time and investment in ALC&Hs' capacity building. Sometimes, there is a gap or conflict between funding bodies' expectations on what ALC&Hs can deliver and an ALC&H having to allow adequate time to deliver, so that it can maintain its integrity and authenticity. There is a need for ongoing mutual respect, understanding and patience to support Communities to achieve sustainable and effective Language revitalisation.

Enabling ALC&Hs to voice their local Community needs and the benefits of investing in these to government and others – and providing ALC&Hs with the means to measure the impacts of this investment – should help bridge misalignments in expectations and open-up innovative and meaningful funding opportunities for ALC&Hs.

## Capacity and capability building for ALC&H staff

Staff managing an ALC&H require a combination of skills and knowledge in governance, operations management and Language expertise. For some people who establish an ALC&H, both existing skills and learning on-the-job are part of the process. However, developing people with the skills and knowledge needed for roles, including enabling training and career pathways (discussed below), would assist Communities to be job-ready, minimise lag times and support continuity in the delivery of urgent Language activities.

For staff and Community already involved in ALC&H work, the need for greater capacity and capability building opportunities was consistently identified. Limited resources restrict ALC&H ability to attract and retain qualified and sufficient staffing, restrict training and development opportunities and restrain strategic planning as ALC&Hs efforts must instead focus on delivering Language activities.

We heard, which was reinforced by research, there is a need for clearer training and staff development pathways and opportunities to build and sustain an ALC&H workforce. Simply accessing training was identified as a barrier, with ALC&Hs finding it difficult to track down TAFE courses offering the particular certifications required (e.g. Aboriginal Languages and Culture [Certificate I-III]) across the State.

Then once training is identified, another barrier is having the time to undertake the course while juggling work demands. The idea of paid study was raised as this would allow some backfilling of roles and sustain ALC&H service continuity. The mapping of training pathways would also likely support ALC&Hs to identify and access the training they need.





## Language teachers

Growing the workforce of Language teachers is critical for Language revitalisation. Although, becoming a Language teacher takes time, and the demand from Aboriginal Communities wanting to revitalise and learn Language is outpacing the number of existing and emerging Language teachers.

Languages being taught in primary and secondary schools, some universities and TAFEs also supports Language learning, creating a foundation for progression into Languages teaching. For example, TAFE NSW developed three nationally accredited Aboriginal Language qualifications in response to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Training Policy Statement 2004-06, with permission of the relevant Elders and Traditional Owners. During the research phase, TAFE NSW identified the “need to provide formal qualification of Aboriginal people’s knowledge and skills and could provide a pathway for graduates of the entry level programs.” (Cipollone, 2010, p. 172). Some universities also teach courses related to Language which helps to build the teaching workforce, including Charles Sturt University, University of Sydney, University of NSW and University of Newcastle.

However, more work is needed to create career pathways for teaching Language. ALC&Hs identified the following tools and systems that could support pathways:

**Use a strengths based and Cultural approach that allows ‘old ways’ for different methodologies to teaching. For example, teaching Language outside of a classroom, emerged in the natural surroundings of Country, providing context and the history of where Language comes from.**

**Development of an Award/pay scale/industrial guidelines that recognises and values Languages work and supports consistency for the Languages sector.**

**Paid school-based or adult traineeships, scholarships and training programs for Language, governance and management. Sustainable funding is also needed to support fulltime Language teaching work as a career.**

In an effort to build the workforce, ALC&Hs are often challenged with supporting Community Language speakers to gain teaching qualifications so they can deliver certified Language classes, while simultaneously supporting their staff with teaching qualifications to learn Language from those same Language speakers and Elders so they can advance their Language teaching (Muurrbay). This can have an enormous drain on ALC&H resources which may already be strained.

## Strategic planning

From a strategic perspective, ALC&Hs expressed an interest and need for support with strategic planning, as well as support in developing their Community Language plans, competitive grant writing skills and identifying research requirements and processes.

At a foundational level, ALC&Hs identified that support to understand the relevance of strategic planning and how to facilitate planning discussions was required. They also recognised the need to overcome the challenge of having insufficient time, capacity and resourcing to do strategic planning.

The ALC&Hs outlined some mechanisms that could support them to be strategic including:

- Development of Community Language Plans (CLPs) that represent the wants and needs of local Communities. CLPs can provide guidance and structure for Community effort; enable the identification of risks and opportunities; support ALC&Hs to set their vision, plan for growth; and provide a basis for ALC&H and Community accountability.
- Strategic planning support and resourcing tailored to the needs of each ALC&H. ALC&Hs expressed a desire for Trust staff to assist with or facilitate their planning processes. Funding to provide ALC&Hs with planning capacity and expertise was also required.
- Impact reporting based on program delivery indicators and measures of success that take account of Aboriginal Community perspectives. This would also provide data to funding bodies to inform where their funding and resources should be focussed.

## Succession planning

Many ALC&Hs rely on very few strong Language speakers to teach and share Language. This can lead to Language speaker burnout and limit the Language activities that ALC&Hs can deliver. Not only is there a need to grow Language speakers, but also a great and urgent need for Language teachers.



ALC&Hs recognise the importance of succession planning for their longevity and it is a priority of many ALC&Hs. ALC&Hs look to encourage young people to engage in Language activities and its administration, so that knowledge is shared, and experience can be gained, to be ready for leadership and governance roles when needed. The teaching of Aboriginal Culture, more broadly, and the responsibilities of Community to continue its teaching can play a role in conveying the message of importance for future generations to participate and lead Language activities.

Even so, ALC&Hs have said that achieving Community participation can be challenging and have identified the need to develop their skills in how to engage people in learning and active participation. Also, once they develop Language teachers, ALC&Hs experience ‘brain drain’ as they lose teachers to outside roles because they cannot offer incentives for people to stay. A lack of local Language career options and pathways is also a factor here.

Where ALC&Hs were able to engage trainees and had capacity and resources to offer training support, there was a sense of relief and confidence that the next generation of Language speakers, teachers and Language leaders were equipped to continue to respond to their local Communities’ Language needs. ALC&Hs identified that paid Language traineeships, free training and better access to training opportunities would support these efforts.

### **Access to archival records**

The process of accessing archives in itself can be a traumatic process for Aboriginal people, and ALC&Hs spoke of the toll this takes. To access archives, Communities need to know where to go for advice about Language archives; understand how to search for archives; acknowledge that many archives are written about Aboriginal people and Culture, not by them, and represent a non-Aboriginal perspective; and that the archives are often dispersed across many repositories (Nakata, 2007) which cannot be accessed in a Culturally sensitive and appropriate environment.

Unfortunately, ALC&Hs still report challenges with establishing partnerships with collection agencies, citing long wait times at public institutions and researchers not responding to Communities' needs but rather their own, are barriers to accessing records ("Language centres meeting notes, Puliima Indigenous Languages and Technology Workshop, 2023", 2023). ALC&Hs also spoke about the pain of being denied access to family and Community recordings and other records. Also, while overall archival institutions wish to support Aboriginal people gaining access to information to support Language revitalisation, unfortunately it is unknown what is in some collections, making it difficult to offer support and guidance to Aboriginal Communities wanting to access these records (Nakata & Langdon, 2005).

Attendees at the 2023 Puliima Indigenous Languages and Technology Workshop highlighted that repatriation of Language resources should be a priority for collection agencies, with protocols. Further, participants suggested establishing a central system or systems where sharing of collected information and resources can be facilitated. ALC&Hs also identified the need for healing programs to support their ability to continue to engage with the archive material and their work overall.

Efforts have been made by collection agencies to guide Aboriginal Communities in navigating accessing archival records. For example, the National Archives of Australia presented 'Introduction to Archives' sessions to raise awareness of the collections they held and for Community to connect with it. Some libraries also run programs to assist parents, carers, teachers and even Aboriginal Medical Services to support them to support children learn Language, which has an added benefit of encouraging children to engage in literacy and learning activities (National Indigenous Languages Report, 2020). Also to support Aboriginal Communities access archival records in a Culturally sensitive way, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN) has developed a the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* (Garwood-Houng & Blackburn, 2014).



# Factors contributing to sustainability of ALC&Hs

## Community-led, owned and controlled

Community-led initiatives empower Aboriginal Communities and the involvement of Elders, Language speakers and Community provide authenticity and integrity. The *National Indigenous Language Survey* (2020) reported that when Community are decision-makers about their Language aspirations, strong Language can be maintained. For example, Communities leading the design and development of Languages resources to ensure that they are suitable and useful for their teachers and learners (Bischoff & Jany, 2018) or local Language speakers shaping the direction and identifying opportunities for the ALC&Hs (Lowe & Walsh, 2009). Community initiated and led Language revitalisation is a critical factor in the longevity and impact of ALC&Hs. Where Community expresses the desire to (re)connect with Culture through Language, the swell of collective support and interest plays an integral part in the promotion, participation, and maintenance of the Language activities.

Many Language activities are launched from a passion and understanding of the spiritual, Cultural, and family/kin connection that speaking Language can bring; as well as the sense of responsibility of transferring Cultural knowledge to future generations (Sivak et al., 2019).

A Community-led and place-based approach provides greater support, engagement and connection between the ALC&H and local Communities they are based within, and it also allows for holistic approaches for example, many ALC&Hs have either Language as their core function with complementary Cultural activities or vice versa. A table of the various functions by ALC&Hs in NSW and other jurisdictions is at Appendix B.

The endorsement and support of Language speakers and Knowledge holders is paramount (Marmion et al., 2014). Some ALC&Hs focus on one Language while others may focus on several, depending on Community need, access to Language resources, ALC&H capacity and resourcing. The determination of which Language(s) to teach relies on the appropriate Cultural authority and endorsement being provided, and Community demand. Why and how this is sought is discussed further below.

## Governance

ALC&Hs need to be strategic in their establishment and governance structure so that they can capitalise on resourcing opportunities but also ensure that they understand the legal, financial and governance requirements to remain compliant and sustainable. There are various business structures that can be established to suit the ALC&H's functions. Business structures differ from one ALC&H to another and Language Communities need to consider factors such as ALC&H functions, Community's needs, the ALC&H's staff skills and expertise in areas such as governance and operations management, and funding to resource the structure. With different structures, there are specific reporting and regulatory requirements to be met to comply with legislation and regulations. Supports such as ORIC and Service NSW's Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative (2022) can assist with advice on these requirements.

### Community governance

Community governance structures enable Communities to influence and support Community input and decision-making in Languages work. Having effective Community governance is seen as vital to ensuring the authenticity and integrity of the ALC&H's Languages work is maintained. Examples of ways Community governance is embedded include establishing an Elders Advisory group and/or Community Language working group and regular consultation and feedback mechanisms between Community and the ALC&H. This also allows for an accountability process and opportunity to pivot or respond to changing Community priorities.



## Recurrent and flexible funding

It is not unusual for a Community's Language journey to be activated with a one-off government grant that supports the start of developing resources or classes to revitalise their local Language (Giacon & Lowe, 2019). Unfortunately, short-term or programmatic funding does not allow the ALC&Hs to sustain their activities or initiate strategic plans. However, in recent years, funding has increased, with a shift in state, national and international attention to focus on Indigenous Language revitalisation. The establishment of the Trust and its five-year Strategic Plan, the United Nations declaration of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032 and subsequent *Australian Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages*, and the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* have contributed to messaging the significance and need for investment in Language revitalisation efforts. Although most funding opportunities are for one-off programs, the Trust and Commonwealth Government have grant programs that target investment for ALC&Hs to sustain their activities. This path enables ALC&Hs to engage staff and plan and carry out activities in the medium and longer-term, reflective of Community aspirations and needs, rather than being project dependent with objectives imposed by various grant funding programs.

Equally important is flexibility and diversity in funding programs to allow Communities to have an approach to their initiative that is meaningful and responsive to the local Communities' Language needs. The Trust's Small grants, Revival Language, Educational scholarship, Languages week and Sustainable Programs grants are examples of the flexibility needed so that Languages activities and investment can be supported.



## Program funding

There is a strong sentiment around Communities being able to access and learn Language free of charge (Aboriginal Languages Trust Consultations Outcomes Report, 2022). Where this principle is adopted by ALC&Hs, it can raise a challenge of ensuring adequate funding is available to operationalise their Community Language aspirations and plans.

For some ALC&Hs who have the means, opportunity and capability, income generating activities create a source of funds that can be invested back into the ALC&H and include:

Produce and sell merchandise e.g. posters, books, homewares, bags, clothes (shirts, jumpers); teaching resources; learning resources e.g. cards, books, audio and video.

Provide advisory or consultant services regarding Language. For example, for dual naming and translation services.

Participate as a speaker at conferences, workshops, events, and other gatherings.

Subscription fees, if hosting an online platform or producing other regular content.

Venue hire or hosting visiting Language events and activities if premises is owned by ALC&H or permitted by the landowner.

All of these things take time to develop in consultation with the appropriate stakeholders but can offer an alternative or additional source of funding.



## Operational funding

In addition to support for Language activities, there is also a need for operational funding opportunities. Currently, operational funding is offered under the Commonwealth's ILA program as a competitive and targeted process. Only the network of 24 Indigenous Language Centres (ILCs) recognised by the ILA program are eligible for the single or multi-year operational funding, and they must meet specific criteria including having previously received an ILA grant program, demonstrated capacity to deliver activities, and a history of good governance (Australian Government, 2024). Eligibility for this funding is currently limited to only four Commonwealth recognised ILCs in NSW.

Regardless of the funding model used by ALC&Hs, strategic and business planning is important for longevity and long-term impact in revitalising Language. It allows ALC&Hs to prioritise efforts, focus energy and effectively allocate resources.

## Capacity and capability building of ALC&H staff

We heard that strengthening Cultural connections and enabling the transfer of knowledge and skills from Cultural knowledge holders and subject matter experts within ALC&Hs and Community is critically important for the ALC&H to deliver on the Communities Languages aspirations. This can include Community knowledge holders sharing Language with staff in ALC&Hs as a form of staff development and succession planning to enable continued and expanded teaching in the Community. Some ALC&Hs have an Elders advisory group to support and guide Language content and teaching methodologies. Another strategy is where an ALC&H has established partnerships with a linguist or researcher who can share their skills with ALC&H staff and participants to build capacity and encourage interest in those fields or workforces.

Developing strategic plans that identify where capacity building is needed in the short, medium and long term helps to strengthen the ALC&H and Community to meet their Language needs. The design, development and implementation processes are instrumental to the capacity building for project teams and Community (Hobson et al., 2018).

## Collaboration and networking

Collaboration amongst ALC&Hs as well as other stakeholders can lend itself to an enabling environment that supports shared learnings, systems reform, efficiency improvements and increased awareness of Language activities.

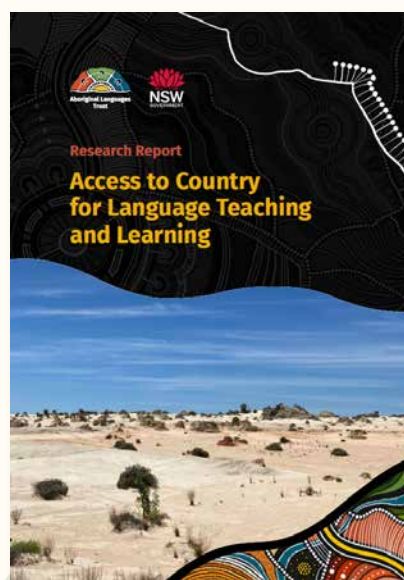
The need for collaboration amongst ALC&Hs was raised in both the desktop research (Aboriginal Languages Trust Consultation Outcomes Report, 2022) and consultations. The opportunity to share learning, stories and resources can strengthen the growth of Aboriginal Languages and be a source of inspiration for new and existing ALC&Hs. Participants of this project stated that there is some connection between ALC&Hs however it is usually based on existing personal relationships. Having a mechanism or process that coordinates ALC&Hs to network can facilitate Languages growth.

Collaboration with linguists and educational institutions is also needed for Language revitalisation. These partnerships can develop Languages resources and records and curriculum design for formal education to grow the Language teacher workforce.

## Access to Country

The connection between Aboriginal Language and Culture is inseparable (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2009; Hoger, 2023). Country is an integral part of Aboriginal Culture in storytelling and song to transfer Cultural knowledge between generations.

According to the Trust's *Consultation Outcomes Report (2022)*, Aboriginal Communities identified Country as necessary to Language revitalisation efforts. Learning Language on Country enables students to connect, provides context and perspective, and experiential learning. Acknowledging this need, the Trust included 'Access to Country' in its *Five-Year Research Agenda 2023-28* (p. 13) to explore 'barriers and identify opportunities for Communities to access Country'. The importance of on-Country learning was recognised by ALC&Hs in that it provides context and strengthens the connection to the Cultural and historical value of Language to Country.



Read the Trust's *Access To Country for Language Teaching and Learning Research Report*

## Access to Language activities and materials

Archival accessibility is acknowledged as a key factor to progress ALC&Hs Language revitalisation and is one of the Trust's research agenda priority areas 'Improving Access' (Aboriginal Languages Trust Five-Year Research Agenda 2023-2028, 2023, p.4).

Access to and use of data was highlighted as a priority for ALC&Hs during the 2023 Puliima Indigenous Languages and Technology Workshop. The need to be able to collect and retain data on Languages for ALC&Hs to access and use in the design, development and implementation of teaching and learning Languages activities can also be drawn from the Language information gathered.

Collaborations between ALC&Hs and collection agencies can not only support access to archival information, but ensure collection and management processes maintain the richness, including scope, depth, and contextualising, of the data collected (Nicholls et al., 2016). The opportunity for the Trust to promote and facilitate, as appropriate, the use of ATSILIRN protocols could assist with building relationships and partnerships.



The use of technology is increasingly playing a critical role in Language revitalisation. Accessibility, teaching techniques and resource transferability are all made more efficient with the use of technology. However, ALC&Hs need to ensure that Community information technology (IT) literacy and connectivity are adequate to use the online/application resources. Conversely, value is still placed on face-to-face interactions and tangible materials for Language learning as much as possible.

## **Broader community awareness and appreciation**

A potential threat is presented when there is a misalignment or conflict of western and Indigenous values and recognition of Aboriginal Languages (National Indigenous Languages Report, 2020).

Where a misalignment is present, it may not impact an Aboriginal person's acknowledgement of the significance of learning Language and the value it brings in connecting with Country and Community, but it can influence the interpretation or perspective of government policy, decision makers and independent funders regarding resourcing to support Language activities. Raising awareness of Aboriginal Languages, their benefits to Community wellbeing and importance to Aboriginal Culture and Australian history and story, can contribute to shift the view of non-Aboriginal people. For example, the inclusion of Aboriginal Language in place naming, site stories and major events e.g. Welcome to Country ceremonies, are some examples of what has and can continue to be implemented as a way to reinforce Language revitalisation and maintenance (National Indigenous Languages Report 2020). The use of Language like this in public events to promote the use of Language was recommended in the 2005 and 2014 national surveys (National Indigenous Languages survey report, 2005; National Indigenous Languages survey report, 2014).

A growing number of ALC&Hs use social media as a platform to promote and educate about the significance and richness of Aboriginal Culture including Language. This can also raise the profile of the ALC&H, particularly where the ALC&H provides activities such as Cultural tourism which appeals to a broad audience.



## SECTION 6

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# Appendix

## Appendix A – CATSI Act and Corporations Act – Differences



FACT SHEET


**Australian Government**  
 Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations




### The CATSI Act and the Corporations Act —some differences


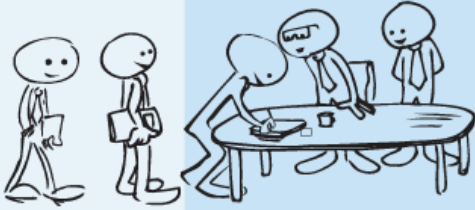
The *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act) is based on the *Corporations Act 2001* (Corporations Act) but in many important ways it is different. The CATSI Act takes the needs and circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into consideration. This fact sheet looks at some of the more important differences between the CATSI Act and the Corporations Act.

<b>Who is the regulator?</b>	<b>Corporations Act</b> Companies registered under the Corporations Act are regulated by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC). ASIC is an independent government body.	<b>CATSI Act</b> Corporations registered under the CATSI Act are regulated by the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations. The Registrar is an independent office holder and is supported by the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC).
<b>Special measure</b>	<b>Corporations Act</b> The Corporations Act is a Commonwealth law that governs the operation of companies.	<b>CATSI Act</b> The CATSI Act is a Commonwealth law that is a special measure for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
<b>Members</b>	<b>Corporations Act</b> The members own the company. There must be at least one member. Private companies must not have more than 50 members. Public companies have no limit on the number of members. There are no age or race restrictions on members. In some circumstances members may have to contribute to the costs of winding up a company.	<b>CATSI Act</b> The members own the corporation. There must be at least five members (unless the Registrar approves a smaller number). There is no limit on the number of members. Depending on the corporation's rule book, members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• must be at least 15 years of age</li> <li>• must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander</li> <li>• won't be liable for the debts of the corporation.</li> </ul> The corporation may have other rules on membership—for example, living in a particular Indigenous community.



<p><b>Directors</b></p> <p>Directors must be at least 18 years old. They must give their permission to become a director.</p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>Any person can be a director; they don't need to be a member.</p> <p>A proprietary (private) company must have at least one director, but doesn't need to have a secretary. The director and secretary (if there is one), must usually live in Australia.</p> <p>A public company must have at least three directors and at least one secretary. At least two of the directors and one secretary must usually live in Australia.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>Corporations can have a rule in their rule book that allows people who are not members to be directors. However, the majority of directors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander</li> <li>• be members of the corporation</li> <li>• not be employees of the corporation.</li> </ul> <p>The minimum number of directors is three and the maximum number is 12. Corporations can apply to the Registrar for an exemption if they want more than 12 directors.</p> <p>The majority of directors must usually reside in Australia.</p> <p>Large corporations must have a secretary. Small and medium corporations have a contact person.</p>
<p><b>Shares or debentures</b></p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>A company can issue shares to its members (proprietary companies) or the public (public companies).</p> <p>A company may issue debentures* and other securities. A debenture is issued by companies in return for funds.</p> <p>* A note or certificate acknowledging a debt.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>Members of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporation cannot own or trade shares in their corporation. However, the members can include rules in the corporation rule book about how any profits will be shared.</p> <p>The CATSI Act does not allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations to issue debentures or other securities.</p>
<p><b>Types of corporations</b></p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>The two main types of companies are <b>proprietary</b> (private) companies and <b>public</b> companies.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>Corporations are registered as small, medium or large.</p>
<p><b>Financial services</b></p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>The Corporations Act has extensive provisions dealing with managed investment schemes and financial products or services.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations cannot provide financial services or be a trade union.</p>
<p><b>Internal governance rules</b></p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>A company can follow the replaceable rules in the Corporations Act or adopt their own constitution.</p> 	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporation must have a rule book which, at a minimum, contains the objectives and name of the corporation, frequency of directors' meetings and a dispute resolution process. The corporation may adopt the replaceable rules in the CATSI Act or modify or replace them—see the Registrar's fact sheet <i>A corporation's rule book: what you need to know</i>.</p>

<p><b>Regulatory assistance</b></p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>Mainstream companies have limited access to regulatory assistance.</p> 	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>The Registrar has the power to appoint a special administrator to a corporation. This power can be used to provide a safety net against the possibility of corporate failure, especially for corporations providing essential services, maintaining infrastructure or holding land.</p> <p>The Registrar can also appoint an examiner to look at a corporation's business. This means 'healthy corporation checks' can be carried out to identify any financial or governance problems.</p> <p>The Registrar also has other unique powers, including the power to change a corporation's rule book or call a general meeting or an annual general meeting or act for members in certain circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Registration requirements</b></p> 	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>Any group or organisation can register as a corporation if they satisfy basic incorporation requirements.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>A body may only be registered as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporation if the Registrar is satisfied that it can meet certain unique standards. These requirements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a majority of directors and members must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander</li> <li>• a minimum age for members</li> <li>• a maximum number of directors</li> <li>• certain rules in its rule book.</li> </ul> <p>While registration is largely voluntary, some legislation requires certain organisations to be registered under the CATSI Act. For example, registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBCs) are required under the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> to be registered under the CATSI Act.</p>
<p><b>Reporting</b></p> <p>Most companies and corporations must lodge reports with their regulator each year, unless their regulator has given an exemption. The types and number of reports vary.</p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>Public and proprietary companies have different reporting requirements.</p> <p>For example, small proprietary companies are excluded from many of the reporting requirements that apply to public companies.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>A corporation must lodge reports with the Registrar according to their registered size and income.</p> <p>For example, small corporations with an income of less than \$100,000 have fewer reports to lodge than large corporations—see the Registrar's fact sheet <i>Corporation size and reporting</i>.</p>
<p><b>Merits review</b></p>	<p><b>Corporations Act</b></p> <p>The Corporations Act allows for a merits review of some ASIC decisions by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. There is no provision for internal review in the Act.</p>	<p><b>CATSI Act</b></p> <p>All reviewable decisions under the CATSI Act are subject to internal review (by an ORIC officer not involved in the original decision) before any appeal can be made to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.</p>

<b>Native title</b>	<b>Corporations Act</b> Corporations that have been determined as RNTBCs by the Federal Court are not allowed to be registered under the Corporations Act.	<b>CATSI Act</b> Corporations that have been determined as RNTBCs by the Federal Court are required to register under the CATSI Act.  The CATSI Act has special provisions for RNTBCs. It makes sure that obligations they have under native title legislation do not conflict with obligations under the CATSI Act.
<b>Fees</b>	<b>Corporations Act</b> ASIC charges fees for the lodgment of some forms and documents—see <a href="http://www.asic.gov.au">www.asic.gov.au</a> for a list of fees for commonly lodged forms.	<b>CATSI Act</b> ORIC does not charge fees for lodging forms and documents.
<b>Other differences</b>	<b>Corporations Act</b> Mainstream provisions in the Corporations Act cover meetings, members and officers.  For example, all public companies must have a secretary and hold an annual general meeting each year.	<b>CATSI Act</b> Many of these provisions have been changed to recognise the special circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations.  For example, small and medium corporations have a document access address because they may not have the resources to maintain a registered office. Many rules about meetings can be replaced in a corporation's rule book to suit each corporation's circumstances—see the Registrar's fact sheets about meetings for more information.

## Important similarities

<b>Legal duties</b>	The legal duties for directors and officers under the Corporations Act and CATSI Act are similar. Sometimes directors, officers and employees can be held personally responsible for actions related to the corporation—see the Registrar's fact sheet <i>Duties of directors and other officers</i> .
<b>Disqualification from managing a company or corporation</b>	<p>You cannot be a company or corporation director if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you are declared bankrupt and have not been discharged, or</li> <li>• you have been disqualified from managing a corporation by being convicted of certain serious offences to do with managing a corporation, serious fraud, duties of directors or trading while insolvent.</li> </ul> <p>Usually people are disqualified for five years.</p> <p>A person who is disqualified under the Corporations Act is automatically disqualified from managing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations—see the Registrar's fact sheet <i>Disqualification from managing corporations under the CATSI Act</i>.</p> <p>The Registrar is required to keep a Register of Disqualified Officers under the CATSI Act. It is available at <a href="http://www.oric.gov.au">www.oric.gov.au</a>.</p>



## CONTACT ORIC

freecall 1800 622 431  
(not free from mobiles)  
email [info@oric.gov.au](mailto:info@oric.gov.au)  
website [www.oric.gov.au](http://www.oric.gov.au)

NOTE: This fact sheet is not a substitute for legal advice. It is intended as a quick overview of the topic. For more detail see the CATSI Act and Corporations Act.

## Appendix B – Various Functions delivered by Aboriginal Language Centres

### Provide a space to connect

- Facilitate connections with other Communities.
- Provide a space/centre to transfer knowledge from one generation to another.
- Facilitate connections with other Communities.
- Provide a space/centre to transfer knowledge from one generation to another.

### Deliver Language activities/lessons

- Teaching Languages, to various cohorts e.g., young people, interested Community members, broader non-Indigenous community.
- Teaching Languages in various context - Cultural camps, on Country, excursions to learn about Language, online.

### Develop Language resources

- Research – work with Elders, local Language custodians and educational organisations.
- Publish accessible Language materials e.g., dictionaries, cards.
- Creation of software program for Aboriginal Languages.

### Repository of language resources

- Access Language information held by institutions.
- Archive resources for Community, keeping place for documentation.

### Promote Language

- Promote language activities.
- Amplify Indigenous voices.
- Place names and education.

### Collaborate with other ALCs and Communities

- Sharing resources and methods of practices.

### Training and development

- Community based training.
- Support accredited and non-accredited training of teachers.
- Develop teaching courses and resources.
- Facilitate Cultural engagement training.

## Appendix C – Current Funding for Aboriginal Languages

### Current investment

Both State and Commonwealth governments offer grants to support Aboriginal Languages activities. The level of investment for Aboriginal Language activities in NSW is difficult to accurately ascertain however can be estimated based on grants provided from specific Aboriginal Languages grant programs. The value is estimated for several reasons; one, because some ALC&Hs deliver multiple services to Community that do not have a Language focus but could be centred around Culture more broadly or operational outlay; two, some grant programs consider Language activities as eligible under broader program objectives around Aboriginal Culture, tourism, economic development and NAIDOC. For instance, a grant program that has a focus on economic development for Aboriginal people and provides funding for training and development as an activity. The funding is not for Languages activities per se but contributes to the operations of an ALC&H.

Research by Mahboob et al. (2017) found that the level of investment in Aboriginal Languages development when compared to other government grant program projects, was small. However, with the establishment of the Trust in 2020, and a growing and greater awareness in Aboriginal Language revitalisation, investment has gradually increased.

### State Government

#### Aboriginal Languages Trust

In supporting ALC&Hs to sustain and maintain or grow their Language revitalisation activities, the Trust offers the Aboriginal Languages Sustainable Program. This program offers funding to eligible Aboriginal Community organisations previously funded under the broader investment program, to continue to support their Language revitalisation efforts. For 2023-24, \$990,000 has been allocated to the [Aboriginal Languages Sustainable Program](#).

The Trust also offer other grant programs which include:

1. [Small grants](#) (\$1,000-\$15,000) supporting critical Language activities.
2. [Revival Language](#) (\$1,000-\$25,000) supporting small scale or one-off projects.
3. [Educational scholarship](#) (1,000 -\$50,000) supporting the development and growth of Language speakers, educators and teachers.

4. **Languages week** (\$1,000-\$5,000) supporting one-off activities and events during NSW Aboriginal Languages Week.

### **Aboriginal Affairs NSW (AANSW)**

AANSW offer a **cultural grant program** which includes Language activities, aiming to “strengthen, protect and maintain traditional and contemporary expression of Aboriginal Culture”. Grants between \$500 to \$20,000 are available and are non-competitive. AANSW has allocated \$1 million for the program in 2023-24. It is unknown exactly what portion of the current year or previous years’ allocation has contributed to Language revitalisation activities with the limited project information publicly available, particularly where Language is incorporated in within a broader Cultural project.

### **Minister’s Discretionary Fund**

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs’ Discretionary Fund (MDF) provides grant support for Community-based projects. Through engagement with Aboriginal communities, the Minister may identify projects that align with *Our Focus - Strengthening policy in NSW through empowered Aboriginal communities*, noting that the priority changes from time to time. Information about the funding allocation is not publicly available.

## **Commonwealth Government**

### **ILA grant program**

The Commonwealth government has an Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) grant program. “The ILA program invests around \$30 million per annum to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their Cultures through Languages and arts activities around Australia.” (“Indigenous Languages and Arts program,” n.d.). The ILA program has open competitive and targeted competitive grant opportunities. The open competitive round is for Community-based organisations wanting to delivery one-off Languages and/or arts activities.

The targeted competitive round is by invitation only to established Community-based Indigenous Language Centres. This targeted round offers multi-year funding for centre operations that aims to allow time for Centres to be strategic in their planning approach and delivery of Community Language activities. The criterion for eligible targeted applicants includes:

- having previously received funding from the ILA program.
- having a demonstrated capacity to deliver quality Indigenous Language or arts projects.

- having a demonstrated history of good governance, good financial management over an extended period, effective business planning and high-quality performance against funding objectives.”

(“Indigenous Languages and Arts Program - Open Competitive Grant Opportunity - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),” 2024).

Further to this, invited applicants must also meet the required standard assessment process.

Currently, this funding is offered to the four NSW ALC&Hs recognised under this program, which are Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre, Regional Enterprise Development Institute Ltd, Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Languages and Culture Co-operative Ltd and Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation.

In 2023-24, the ILA program provided over \$5 million funding support nationally, for about 127 Community-based arts and Languages projects. Some of these projects were over two years (2023-24-2024-25) (2023-24 Indigenous Languages and Arts program grant recipients, 2023). A list of recipients from 2016-17 through to 2023-24 can be found on the ILA website (“Indigenous Languages and arts program,” n.d.).

## Philanthropic funding sources

There are funding sources available from philanthropic foundations. For instance, the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF) provides a service to connect philanthropists via their foundations and funds to other like-minded philanthropists to collectively and strategically support their causes, making a greater impact. ACF’s ‘Impact’ category has a focus area on ‘Supporting Indigenous Communities’. The focus area for funding changes from time to time, with last year’s focus being justice and a total of \$12.6m distributed to First Nations communities; up from \$2.6m the previous financial year. (“Annual report 2022/23, Our Impact,” n.d.).

## Other funding platforms


### First Nations Futures


First Nations Futures was established in 2020 and is managed by an Aboriginal Board of Directors from across Australia. [First Nations Futures](#) was established to support First Nations Community-led initiatives facing economic barriers such as short-term funding and restrictive eligibility criteria. First Nations Futures develops partnerships with First Nations Community-led initiatives and donors who share values alignment with their impact model of “supporting, strengthening and investing” in future generations.


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