



Intervention by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

Speaker: Councillor Anne Dennis

Item 7: International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)

Thank you Madam Chair.

My name is Anne Dennis, I am a Councillor for the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council and I am a proud Gamilaraay woman.

I speak on behalf of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council.

As we approach the midpoint of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, we therefore recommend:

1. that Member States and UNESCO use the 2027 mid-term review as a moment of accountability and commit to measurable outcomes for the second half of the Decade;
2. that States develop or strengthen Indigenous-led national action plans for language revitalisation, supported by long-term and sustainable financing;
3. that Indigenous languages be recognised and integrated into education systems, public services and digital technologies;
4. that all language technologies and artificial intelligence initiatives be developed with the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and under Indigenous governance arrangements; and
5. that further consideration be given to the development of an international convention on Indigenous language rights.

ALWAYS WAS, ALWAYS WILL BE.



Madam Chair,

Language is far more than communication. It carries our laws, our knowledge systems, our cultural authority and our connection to Country. When Indigenous languages are lost, so too is an irreplaceable part of humanity's cultural heritage.

There has been important progress during the first half of the Decade. We have seen growing recognition of Indigenous languages, increased investment in digital technologies and the development of national and institutional action plans in some jurisdictions. However, implementation remains uneven and many Indigenous communities continue to face barriers to sustainable financing, legal protection and long-term institutional support.

In New South Wales, we have seen encouraging examples of good practice. The establishment of the NSW Aboriginal Languages Trust under the Aboriginal Languages Act 2017 and the ongoing work of Aboriginal communities, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and language organisations demonstrate that sustained, Indigenous-led investment can support language revitalisation and renewal. These initiatives show that when Indigenous Peoples are empowered to lead, our languages can be reclaimed, strengthened and passed on to future generations.

As an organisation whose Chairperson, Dr Raymond Kelly, serves on the Board of the NSW Aboriginal Languages Trust and has dedicated decades to the protection of Indigenous language and cultural heritage, we recognise both the opportunities and the challenges that lie ahead in the second half of the Decade.

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The second half of the International Decade must move from awareness to implementation and from recognition to revitalisation. Artificial intelligence presents significant opportunities to support language learning, translation, interpretation and digital archives. However, these technologies must be developed with the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and must not become another mechanism for extracting Indigenous knowledge and cultural data without consent or benefit.

Indigenous communities must retain ownership, control and governance over their languages, cultural knowledge and data. AI should strengthen Indigenous self-determination, not undermine it.

Before the Decade's mid-term review in 2027, the international community must move beyond commitments and towards measurable action.

Our languages have survived despite generations of dispossession, assimilation and attempts at eradication. With genuine partnership, adequate resources and respect for Indigenous self-determination, they will continue to thrive for generations to come.

Thank you.

ALWAYS WAS, ALWAYS WILL BE.

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