

Department of Education and Training

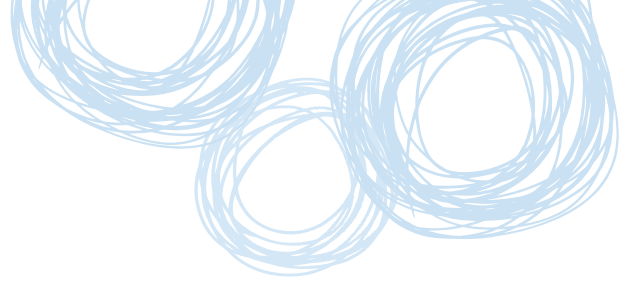
# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement



Tomorrow's Queensland:  
strong, green, smart, healthy and fair

**Toward**   
Tomorrow's Queensland

 **Queensland**  
Government



## Statement of purpose

The Department of Education and Training (DET) values the languages of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities in Queensland. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, like all languages, are an important part of culture and identity. Recognising the importance of languages to the achievements and wellbeing of students and their families is crucial to achieving our shared goal of closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. Success in education is absolutely fundamental to this process.

Reconciliation is also a key priority of the Queensland Government. Greater understanding and shared ownership of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages — traditional languages, creoles and related varieties — will contribute to the Australian identity of all students, schools and communities, and will sustain Queensland’s unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic and cultural heritage.

## Definitions

*Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages*<sup>1</sup> refers to all the languages spoken within Australia prior to colonisation. These languages inform a holistic world view of land, culture and identity, and are linguistically very different to English. Within Queensland, over 130 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groupings have been recognised, with approximately 600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages across Australia.

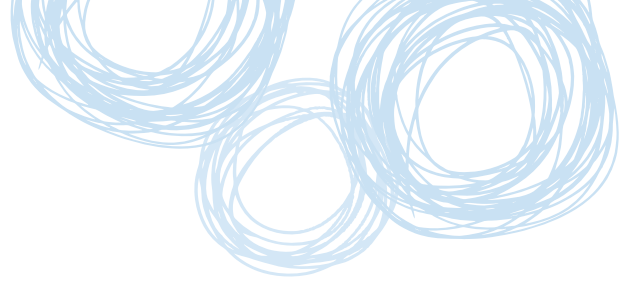
*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creoles and related varieties* are languages that have evolved through contact between people who speak different languages. A number of different creole varieties are spoken throughout Queensland. These creoles may not be officially recognised, but may be referred to in their communities through a range of names such as Murri, Broken, Slang, Lingo and Aboriginal English. Many Torres Strait Islander students speak Torres Strait Creole, now known in the Torres Strait as Yumpla Tok.



The DET *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement* provides the basis to assist Queensland educators and school communities to support the languages and cultures of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school context. This statement builds on *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools*, a key initiative within the department, and supports the Closing the Gap education strategy.

*Standard Australian English (SAE)* is the language used in Australian schools as the primary means of communication, instruction and assessment. English is a language of international significance capable of providing many educational, employment and economic opportunities. For this reason, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples consider proficiency in SAE to be important for all students in our schools.

<sup>1</sup> The term *traditional languages* refers to those languages recognised by Indigenous communities as languages belonging to country. It is not intended to refer only to historical forms of these languages, as traditional Indigenous languages, as with all languages, have evolved over time.



## Languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students come to school from a diverse range of language backgrounds due to the rich and complex language situation in Queensland.

The degree to which students speak a traditional language depends on the different historical and life circumstances surrounding individuals, families, communities and language groups. Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been denied the right to speak their traditional languages, and enforced removals to institutions and other settlements further reduced their use. As a result, widespread language shift<sup>2</sup> has occurred and new language varieties have emerged. These are being increasingly recognised as distinctive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

In some areas of Queensland, particularly rural and remote areas, traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are spoken within families and

communities. In other areas, creoles and related linguistic varieties may have been spoken as a first language for generations. Elsewhere, for the first time in this generation, students who speak a traditional language may be acquiring the regional creole as their second or subsequent language.

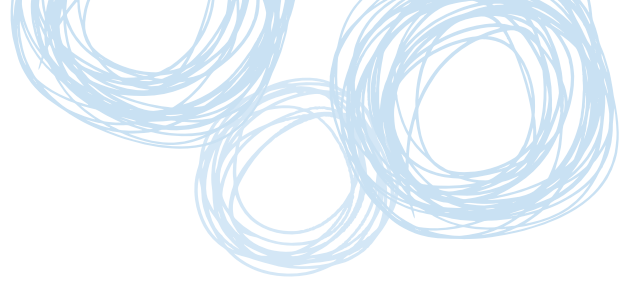
As language backgrounds are determined by a range of factors including family situations and exposure to different languages, a student's linguistic background cannot be assumed. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students speak more than one language variety. Some students may speak SAE as their first language, and acquire creoles and related varieties through their interactions with others.

Creoles and related varieties tend not to carry the same prestige as Standard Australian English in mainstream contexts. However, these are the everyday languages of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families, and must be recognised and valued as such.

It is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to develop the ability to confidently use their first language/s as well as Standard Australian English.



<sup>2</sup> Language shift refers to the process whereby a family or speech community using one language shifts to using another language variety due to language contact brought about by factors such as war, colonisation, resettlement and migration.



## Language is culture and identity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are strongly linked to culture, country and identity. They include rules about communication, culturally bound concepts and knowledge systems. Through language, relationships are developed, culture taught, information transmitted, knowledge learned and stories told.

Within traditional languages, stories of communities, connections to country, seas, waterways and sky, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices are passed down from generation to generation. These knowledges are uniquely Australian, developed from and within local Australian environments.

Each traditional language, creole and related variety belongs to particular lands or islands, and is owned by particular people. Together they represent a strong network of spoken languages, directly linked to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and interconnected within the distinctive local areas throughout Queensland.

A student's language is integral to their sense of identity and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have a vital role to play in building and enriching community life. The unique language situation in Queensland is a significant part of the state's rich cultural heritage and historical legacy.

### 3 way strong language approach

DET has engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and community members to develop the 3 way strong language approach to support teachers to understand and respond to the complex Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language situation in Queensland.

*3 way strong* builds on the phrase '*2 way strong*', which is used to describe the desire for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow deep and strong understandings of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. *3 way strong* includes the language perspective.

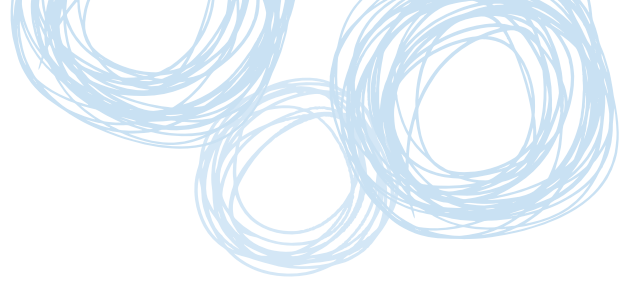


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages need to be recognised, valued and supported in schools, and in developing relationships with families and communities. Initiatives that develop culture and language have been found to be significant factors in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation, attendance and achievements in schools.

### DET schools will:

1. Recognise and value the language varieties which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are using for their 'everyday' talk
2. Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in learning and achieving in schools by teaching Standard Australian English explicitly, actively and meaningfully
3. Support children's access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional languages and cultures.





### **3 Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional languages and cultures**

International and national recognition of the importance of keeping traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages alive has led to strong efforts to maintain those languages still in use and to revitalise or revive others. Colonisation has had, and continues to have, drastic consequences on traditional languages. Less than 10 of the original 130 traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages of Queensland are now fluently spoken. The loss of languages and the aspiration to maintain, revitalise or revive them are heartfelt matters, not just for local communities, but for all with an interest in Queensland's cultural heritage.

Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are oral languages, but over time, some have been recorded and converted into written records. In some communities, language revival programs are increasing the use of traditional languages, while in other areas traditional languages are no longer spoken. Regardless of the local situation, the department is committed to valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and supporting communities' aspirations for their traditional languages.

Studying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language is also an act of reconciliation and a righting of past injustice. It can develop cultural knowledge, pride and identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. DET schools are committed to raising the awareness of all students in understanding and appreciating traditional languages within the curriculum and broader school activities.

### **To achieve the 3 way strong language approach**

The department will:

- provide leadership, information and approaches to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools
- strengthen our relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders
- support schools to develop local solutions to teaching traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- increase the skills of our workforce to value and recognise students' home languages
- deliver high quality explicit teaching and learning that builds Standard Australian English.