Submission to the Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

This submission is from a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers with practical experience in the areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander[1]education and training, and languages teaching, learning and assessment. The submission has been prepared by Denise Angelo and Catherine Hudson in consultation with Emma Browne, Sally Dixon, Marmingee Hand, Inge Kral, Susy Macqueen, Corina Norman, Carmel O'Shannessy, Susan Poetsch, Mark Richards, Jasmine Seymour and Jane Simpson. We are associated through TRILEC (Translational Research in Indigenous Language Ecologies Collective) at the Australian National University and through numerous collaborative research projects on topics relevant to this submission. Our collective experience goes across preschool, primary and secondary school and adult education (VET and university), a wide variety of community contexts (urban, regional, rural and remote), and diverse language ecologies. Over and above their professional and academic experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers contribute their lived experiences and living knowledge of these areas.

In this submission we call for transformative actions, rather than an exclusive focus on enumerating and quantifying gaps. In our opinions, a transformational and action-based approach promotes the ethos of the refreshed Closing the Gap policy suite, namely support for concerted efforts by, with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to redress demonstrable inequitable outcomes.

We address the policy areas of First Nations **Early Childhood Education** and **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages**, specifically Outcomes 3, 4 and 16 from our professional and academic backgrounds, and in addition, in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, from personal expertise too.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
- **Outcome 3**
  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years

- **Outcome 4**
  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES
- **Outcome 16**
  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing

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We recommend **Early Childhood Education** (ECE) as an area of particular importance for Closing the Gap and for the close attention of the Productivity Commission. It is an area of great activity at the moment, worldwide. However, what is said and done in this space and what is promoted as good practice may or may not be directly transferable to linguistically

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[1] The terms 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'First Nations' are used with respectful intent to refer to the original peoples of the Australian mainland and associated islands.

heterogeneous cohorts of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. There are opportunities here, but pitfalls too.

We also consider strengthening **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages** as an especially significant area in Closing the Gap for the Productivity Commission's oversight. It is the only target that at its heart is an exclusively Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concern. Indigenous languages represent one of the new areas in Closing the Gap which were added to reflect community aspirations expressed through the Refresh Consultations process. There is also momentum in the area with the current focus of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Recognising and responding to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language contexts across Australia is key.

THE NEED FOR A LANGUAGE PERSPECTIVE

Languages intersect with all policy areas
In addition to considering our proposals for these target areas, we ask that the Productivity Commission and other key government stakeholders accountable for Closing the Gap targets take on board the larger point that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a linguistically diverse group. In broad terms, some communities speak traditional languages as their main language, others a new contact language and others are predominately English speaking. Therefore nationwide targets, priority areas and reforms will always need differentiation on the basis of language.

Wherever a policy is put into action, the language through which the service is delivered will be a factor in its effectiveness. For example, if health services or education services are delivered exclusively through English, then the English proficiency of clients/students will be a factor in their effective engagement and uptake of the service. Each and every policy area which depends on communication with/between people should include whether and how it is differentiated at the local point of delivery to match their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' language repertoires.

Additionally, a vital mechanism in making their languages stronger (Outcome 16) is shoring up the use of Indigenous languages in domains beyond everyday family and community member interactions. This pushes back on the marginalisation of Indigenous languages. Languages measures applicable across policy domains might involve
- development of local languages/point of delivery guidelines for services
- increased training and employment of local languages speaking staff
- new ways of accrediting and remunerating local languages expertise
- development of new training and employment pathways in interpreting and translating

Languages - a policy free zone?
Languages are used in every area of our lives. But in Australia, languages have been a policy free zone for decades, at best inconsistent and piecemeal. For First Nations peoples, traditional Indigenous languages, new contact Indigenous languages and Indigenised Englishes are all Indigenous ways of talking. They all require particular policy responses. In addition, there is Standard Australian English which is typically learned by speakers of Indigenous languages as an additional language or dialect. It too requires a consistent policy response that recognises and provides respectful services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children who have English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).

Keeping in mind Outcome 16, maintaining and/or strengthening existing Indigenous language repertoires is a priority, as is -in addition- providing English language learning opportunities and support.

Not since the 1980's has Australia had a broad languages policy that engages with the different types of languages in First Nations peoples' languages repertoire, with recommendation for each type (Lo Bianco, 1987). We recommend revisiting a holistic approach to languages policy which embraces the languages wealth of Australia and the specific languages interests and aspirations of First Nations. Our reasoning is that some languages services (interpreting, translating, teaching, researching etc), training, accreditation and employment pathways and mother tongue human rights are not all encompassed by the Closing the Gap's wording in Outcome 16 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing) and its indicators.

Many languages services and policy domains should be inclusive of Indigenous languages speakers and speakers of all languages other than English, for example through services such as interpreting and translating, teaching English as an Additional Language/Dialect etc, but neither currently nor historically have been so. An illustrative case is a gap in the Early Childhood Education curriculum. All reasonable people would imagine that national guidelines for this age cohort, like the *Early Years Learning Framework* (DET 2009/2019, in revision), would reflect the fact that many youngsters in a multilingual country like Australia would commence with languages other than English: A guaranteed 100% of young children in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We would all imagine that educators would be given advice on best practice for this considerable cohort. Think again. Not in the national *Educator's Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework of Australia* (DEEWR 2010) or the *Early Years Learning Framework* itself . The reason that such a (glaring) gap exists, we would assert, is the absence of much-needed, broad languages policy.

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FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: OUTCOMES 3 & 4

Outcome 3
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years

Outcome 3 is going well and on track in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment in the Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS). However, the target only measures enrolment and does not attempt to measure its "high quality" or "culturally appropriate" aspects. Since Outcome 3 is one of the few on-track Closing the Gap outcomes, this surely allows for directing the focus of "additional effort" entailed in Closing the Gap initiatives towards improving the quality of Early Childhood Education the children are engaged in.

An obvious way to operationalise "culturally appropriate" is to recognise and cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's languages: the languages they speak as their first and main language (mother tongue, L1), and the languages they are learning in addition (L2s), such as the First Nation language of place, the language(s) of their family heritage and/or English. This joins the dots with Outcome 16 on strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (see FIGURE 1 and FIGURE 2 below). Not least it could work towards

providing a sensible base of languages data, given the paucities of Census data and limitations of other available survey data.

FIGURE 1. RECOGNISING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGES BACKGROUNDS: SAMPLE RECOMMENDED DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Language name (or description, e.g. where it is spoken)	Spoken as a mother tongue Yes/No?	Learned as an additional language say almost anything know a few words	Used how often?
Traditional Indigenous Languages Name?		⟵──────────────⟶	
New Indigenous contact Languages Name?		⟵──────────────⟶	
Indigenised English Name?		⟵──────────────⟶	
Standard national languages Name?		⟵──────────────⟶	

SOURCE: Adapted from Angelo et al (2022: 84)

FIGURE 2. RECOGNITION AND CATERING FOR A CHILD'S LANGUAGES

Child's languages	How is each language recognised and catered for?
Which language(s) does the child speak as a mother tongue/first language? Name(s)?	
Which Indigenous language(s) does the child connect with culturally? (e.g. language of place, of heritage) Name(s)?	
Which language(s) is child learning as additional/second languages? Name(s)?	

SOURCE: Adapted from Angelo et al (2022: 85)

Outcome 4
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

Outcome 4 is currently asserted to be not on track in terms of the target proportion (55%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track across all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

However, this tool is problematic for measuring and reporting on the "development" of the linguistically diverse cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It is in fact a de-facto English language assessment. It is not designed for the job of measuring and reporting on this cohort. Age-level English proficiency is assumed even though children from non-English speaking backgrounds have varying levels of English language proficiency. Closing the Gap data and reports generated from the AEDC do not disaggregate Indigenous children who are English language learners from Indigenous children who are L1/mother tongue English language speakers (Angelo & Hudson 2022). We believe this is because the role of the English language and children's proficiency is not consistently recorded and

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highly visible in the reports of the AEDC, which as a tool was never designed to be sensitive to multilingual children's development. There are alerts and footnotes and a separate information sheet, but these are not core, front and centre in AEDC outputs.

The problems this creates are multiple, but there are solutions.

De-facto English language assessment: Closing the Gap should have an interest in supporting Indigenous children who enter school as English language learners when they are expected to be learning mainstream curriculum content via the English language. Jurisdictions and sectors do have EAL/D second language proficiency tool sand assessment processes. With training for educators who conduct EAL/D assessment, these tools could be used to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as EAL/D learners, assess their level of proficiency, and then their EAL/D learning could be supported and monitored as they progress through their schooling. This data set can be used to disaggregate AEDC results (every 3 years). We urge that this be undertaken particularly for the domains of Language and Cognitive Skills and Communication skills and general knowledge.

Misdirecting educators' efforts: If the role of the English language is invisible in the AEDC data reports, then educators, schools and policy makers are not directed to support English language learners. If the strength of Indigenous children's mother tongue/L1 is invisible in the AEDC data reports, then educators and policy makers are not given direct messages to support young language speakers in their schooling. When the additional languages children are learning are not considered important enough to be visible in data and reports, then this positioning transfers to educators and policy makers and are unlikely to evaluated as important. Recognising children's languages, those that they bring with them speaking strongly, and those that they are engaged in learning - and how these are catered for in classroom teaching and learning are an avenue for combatting "language invisibility" induced by the AEDC.

Strengths of children may be invisible: If information about Indigenous children's mother tongues/L1s) and the children's role as competent multilinguals who are learners of English as an additional or subsequent language is missing from reports, the AED/C misses out on the opportunity for reporting on significant and explanatory strength-based indicators. Rather there is a 'drift' to deficit, and sometimes determinist, interpretations of the AED/C reports. In the year before full-time schooling (YBFS), where ECE is close to family and community, there is an opportunity for educators to explore information about children's languages and communicative strengths. These can then be communicated to schools on transition into school. Processes and training can be devised for non-Indigenous teachers to sensitively work with parents and community to learn about the languages children speak, and their role as learners of English as an Additional language. Observation tools can be devised for opportunities to gather information about children's communicative strengths and knowledges, observed in play-based learning situations, and in early learning contexts once in school. Data is then available to report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as successful as multilingual, aspirational learners.

We offer additional specific suggestions and guidance on each outcome and its target below for consideration in Commonwealth and jurisdictional implementation plans.

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FOCUS ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES: OUTCOME 16

Outcome 16 expresses a keenly felt aspiration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages to be "strong, supported and flourishing". The target is for a sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages by 2031. We applaud the inclusion of a Closing the Gap outcome that is designed to redress a history of marginalising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and their speakers. However, we urge the Productivity Commission and accountable Closing the Gap officers to take a differentiated approach to this outcome by acknowledging the very different situations of Indigenous languages across the continent and to consider additional and alternate measures to monitor progress. In particular we note that re-awakening a language which is not spoken as the first language of the community is a very long process, and is not likely to result in a "strong" language within the timespan of a decade. Certainly, a language from this context could be made strong**er**, and this gain could be measured on suitable tools.

Factoring in diversity

The positive and aspirational wording of this outcome could send a potentially misleading message that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are in the same situation. Getting a language to a strong(er) state involves very different pathways compared to maintaining a language in a strong(ish) state. It stands to reason, then, that different measures of these pathways would also be required.

Some traditional language groups are working with archival resources together with some community remembrances, painstakingly researching and building up their language, with a view to being able to learn, teach and use more of their language. Language activists – researchers, learners, teacher and Elders– work very hard to make their language stronger in these revival/re-awakening contexts. Each language has different archival materials of different types, quantities and qualities, different historical circumstances around their language shift, and very different levels of support through language centres, school programs, funding grants etc.

Measures of increasing strength in revival/re-awakening language contexts might be:
- getting onto the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016) (which does yet not list all Indigenous languages)
- numbers of people identifying culturally with the language (Census, NILS, Early Childhood Education/school enrolment)
- numbers and kinds of opportunities for language learning (community based, school (preschool, primary, high), TAFE, university, language centre, on-Country experiences…)
- increase in learners' levels of self-assessed proficiency (on a common language assessment tool)
- numbers of language teachers, and people employed in other language roles
- numbers and kinds of language resources

At the other end of the spectrum, some language groups are speaking their traditional language as their main everyday language, and this language is still being transmitted intergenerationally. Their strong(ish) status is far from assured, as the ongoing use of even "strong" traditional languages is not consistently certain. In fact, keeping languages strong is about pushing back on diminishing domains in which these languages are used, delivering

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services through these languages, including education, and ensuring that there are school qualifications, employment opportunities and training pathways for speakers.

Measures of increasing strength in mother tongue traditional language contexts might be:
- numbers of people stating they speak the language fluently, as their main language, including children (Census, NILS, Early Childhood Education/school enrolment)
- numbers and kinds of intentional opportunities provided for language use (school (preschool, primary, high), TAFE, university, media, services - health, legal etc, …)
- opportunities for accreditation and qualifications in own language
- numbers of schools providing education in students' mother tongue/main everyday language
- numbers of people, including secondary students gaining VET certificates in Indigenous language and bilingual areas (language studies, proficiency certificates, interpreting, translating etc)
- numbers of secondary students undertaking advanced (senior school years, matriculation recognised) Indigenous language courses in their mother tongue/main everyday language
- people intentionally employed in roles requiring language proficiency and remunerated for these skills
- numbers and kinds of language resources

Then there are the new Indigenous contact languages - some of these –Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole (spoken in the far north-east) and Kriol (spoken in the north and north-west) have the largest numbers of speakers of all Indigenous languages. These new languages are the result of language contact histories. There are no processes by which new contact languages are recognised officially. For example, being named, included on the Australian Standard Classification of Languages etc. As for all languages spoken as a mother tongue/main everyday language (and therefore overlapping with mother tongue suggestions above), new Indigenous contact languages are the main languages of their speakers and, naturally, speakers benefit from being able to communicate, study and work with them. Like other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are reviving their traditional languages, speakers of new Indigenous contact languages also are affiliated to one or more traditional language which they also care deeply about and work to learn and make strong (as per language revival suggestions above)

Measures of strength for new Indigenous contact languages might be:
- number of contact languages recognised, e.g. being described, named and listed on the ASCL (ABS 2016) and in the AUSTLANG (AIATSIS database)
- numbers of documents outlining processes for recognising new Indigenous contact languages
- numbers of people stating they speak the language fluently, as their main language (Census, NILS, Early Childhood Education/school enrolment)
- numbers and kinds of intentional opportunities provided for language use (school (preschool, primary, high), TAFE, university, media, services - health, legal etc, …)
- opportunities for accreditation and qualification in own language
- numbers of schools providing education in students' mother tongue/main everyday language
- numbers of people, including secondary students gaining VET certificates in Indigenous language and bilingual areas (language studies, proficiency certificates, interpreting, translating etc)

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- numbers of secondary students undertaking advanced (senior school years, matriculation recognised) Indigenous language courses in their mother tongue/ main everyday language
- people intentionally employed in roles requiring language proficiency and remunerated for these skills
- numbers and kinds of language resources

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages data

Much research has noted that data collected on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is problematic (e.g. Angelo et al. 2019; Simpson 2018). The Census has national coverage - but just the one question. It does not have enough questions about speaking languages at home to capture the multilingual reality of many First Nations people. Because there is just this one question which people wish to respond to about their language, they interpret and answer it in widely different ways, making it problematic for measuring increasing language strength: For example, responses may indicate speaking a language other than English fully and proficiently as a main language or may indicate using (some of) a language as a means of learning or re-awakening it. On top of this, only responses for languages on the ASCL are tallied separately, per language; responses for other languages are not disaggregated. The National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) through AIATSIS has more and higher quality language questions. These questions are, however, answered from a much smaller number of respondents, so coverage may be inadequate. To date, this has been mitigated by the language expertise of AIATSIS staff, who have known how to triangulate NILS responses with other languages data, for example, and so are able to distinguish re-awakening languages from strong(-ish) languages.

This inadequate collection of data in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages needs to be addressed in order to enable Outcome 16. For example, research for the 2020 *National Indigenous Language Report* developed a system of language ecologies to assist with differentiating these different language contexts ("language ecologies", see FIGURE 3) and mapped these (FIGURE 4) (Angelo et al. 2019). Indigenous languages data could be disaggregated by language ecology type or language ecology area to more accurately represent the language situation and any language strengthening that occurs.

FIGURE 3. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE ECOLOGY TYPES

speaking a variety of English as a first and main language • adding traditional language • (maybe adding Standard Australian English)
speaking a new Indigenous contact language • adding traditional language • adding English
speaking a traditional language • adding English

SOURCE: Adapted from Angelo (2021: 54-5)

FIGURE 4. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE ECOLOGIES MAP
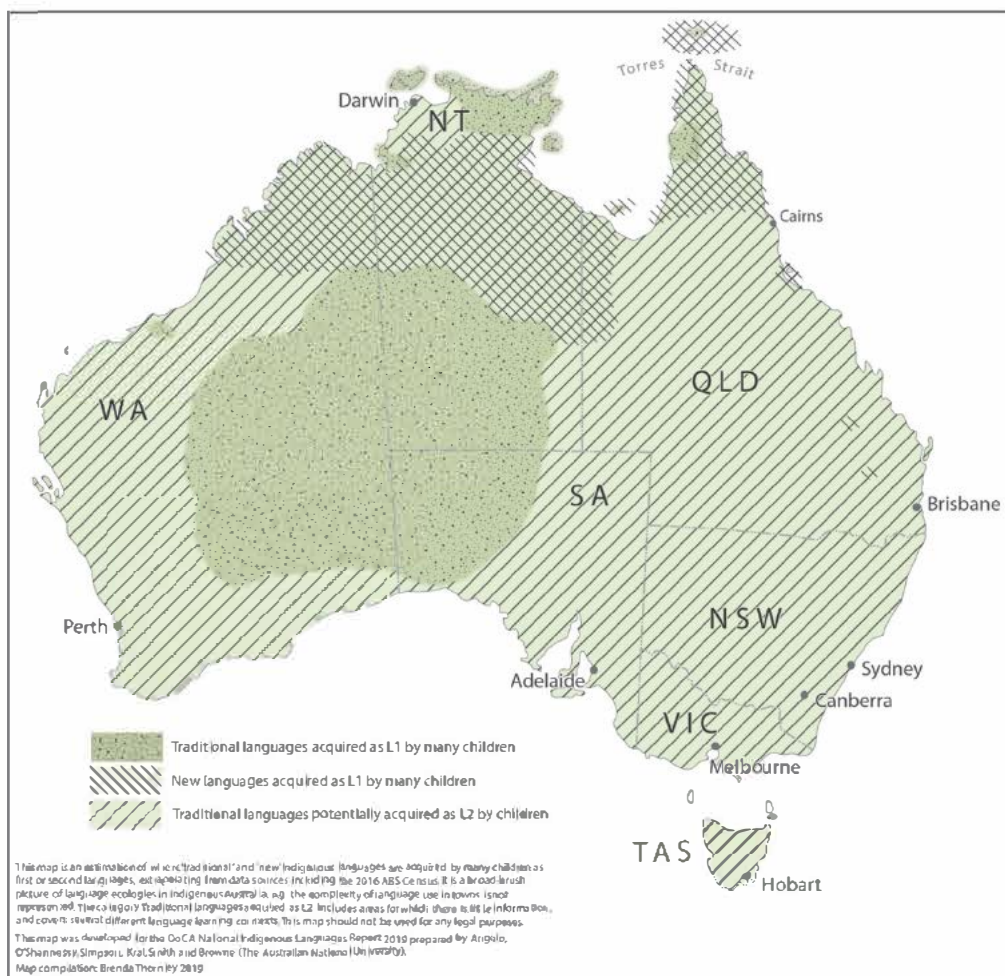
SOURCE: Angelo et al (2019: 16)

For example, the ABS could assist the measurement of this outcome considerably by revising the ASCL to be more inclusive and by adding extra languages questions. By way of example, see the four language questions from the Canadian Census in FIGURE 5 below. Such questions distinguish on the basis of functional load (the main language spoken at home, versus a heritage/identity language being used at home as much as possible); proficiency (the main and strongest language most able to express complicated ideas versus saying some words and short sentences).

FIGURE 5. CANADIAN CENSUS LANGUAGE QUESTIONS

The **Canadian Census** asks the following 4 languages questions:

(7) Can this person speak English or French well-enough to conduct a conversation?

(8) (a) What language does this person speak **most often** at home?

　　(b) Does this person speak other languages **on a regular basis** at home?

(9) What is the language that this person **first learned** at home in **childhood and still understands**?

(45) (a) In this job, what language of did this person use **most often**?

　　(b) Does this person use any other languages **on a regular basis** in this job?

SOURCE: Language Reference Guide (numbers as per original source document), https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm

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We offer additional specific suggestions and guidance on this outcome and its target below for consideration in Commonwealth and jurisdictional implementation plans.

ADDITIONAL SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS & GUIDANCE: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

OUTCOME 3
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, linguistically and culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Target 3: By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95 per cent.
By 2025, Early Childhood Education settings will report how they are recognising and catering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's languages.

Indicators:
Contextual information:
- Rate of attendance in early childhood education in the year before full-time schooling
- Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care service providers
- Progress towards parity

Add:
- Linguistic diversity of the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Numbers of staff with language repertoires matching children's
- Development of training and accreditation for speakers of local Indigenous languages
- Number of ECE centres able to demonstrate recognition and catering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- Development of ECE curriculum for supporting home languages while learning English as an additional language

Disaggregation:
- States/territories
- Remoteness areas
- Socio-economic status of the locality
- Gender

Add
- Children's language backgrounds (main language of communication, heritage language / language of identity)
- English language learner status
- English proficiency level

Data Development:
Explore options to measure and report:
- rate of enrolment and attendance of three-year-olds (two years before full-time schooling) in early childhood education
- proportion of early childhood education facilities attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children meeting or exceeding National Quality Standard
- access to culturally appropriate early childhood education programs
- number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years' service providers

- barriers to attendance (including out-of-pocket costs, access to services, transport, housing)
- parental education, health and disability
- health and disability of children

Add/edit
- linguistically: "linguistically and culturally appropriate". Measures could be whether staff have overlapping language repertoires with the children, whether and how the Early Childhood Education setting caters to children's languages
- access to bilingual education. A range of very different responses are called "bilingual education". This could be broken down into (1) services that cater for children's mother tongue/L1 and their English language learning in addition; (2) services that cater to English speaking children, but intentionally teach another language in addition
- Accountability for developing linguistically appropriate local "language documents" reflecting local language ecology, such as including mother tongue/L1 speakers and resources to cater for children's L1 and support for learning L2 of significance e.g., English, or a traditional heritage language
- ~~lessons~~ linguistically suitable support and case studies from Commonwealth, state and territory early childhood education support initiatives

When this target is met, develop future targets for enrolment and attendance rates for two years before full time schooling. (Are there studies of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who speak languages other than English, showing benefits for their languages and culture... best practices for this multilingual cohort?...)

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OUTCOME 4
Target 3: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55 per cent.

Indicators:
Drivers:
- Preschool attendance and enrolment
- Primary carer education level
- Language backgrounds

Contextual information:
- Outcomes by AEDC domains (developmentally vulnerable, at risk, on track)
- AEDC Multiple Strengths Indicator (highly developed, well developed and emerging strengths)
- Language backgrounds
- English language learner status and EAL/D proficiency levels

Progress towards parity:
Disaggregation
- States/territories
- Remoteness areas
- Socio-economic status of the locality
- Gender
- Language backgrounds
- English language learner status and EAL/D proficiency levels

Data Development:

Explore options to measure and report:

- linguistically and culturally-appropriate childhood development, such as the provision of early childhood education by community-controlled organisations
- health of children
- proportion of children who have regular health and development check-ups
- rates of access to nurse home visiting programs
- proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in poverty

Add

- Develop an observation tool for the Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) - strengths-based (e.g. Foundations for Success unpacking of EYLF outcomes: https://foundationsforsuccess.qld.edu.au/learning-areas, with teacher reflection questions)
- Collect language background data (as in Figures 1 & 2 above)
- English as an Additional Language/Dialect learner identification and assessment in the school years inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners
- Disaggregate English language learners from English language speakers in AEDC data. There is a much higher percentage of Indigenous children described as 'Developmentally Vulnerable' in the two domains dependent on English and assessed in English: Language & Cognitive Skills and Communication skills and general knowledge. English language proficiency plays a part here
- Develop national EAL/D language curriculum for primary years
- Report on local recognition and support for children's main and additional languages

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ADDITIONAL SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS & GUIDANCE: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

OUTCOME 16
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are stronger, more supported and flourishing

Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken and provided for in service delivery.

Indicators:
Drivers

- Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages categorised as strong(er) (It would make more sense if Outcome 16 measured increased strength, rather than an absolute. It is a long road from a sleeping language to a strong language - not achieved within a decade. It is also important to reinforce the position of strong languages and make them stronger too.)
- Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken (Neither the Census nor NILS reports a comprehensive list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages: The number of languages recorded will certainly increase if they are all counted. The most comprehensive list of traditional Indigenous languages and varieties is the AIATSIS AUSTLANG database - it does not yet have an up-to-date listing of Indigenous contact languages.)
- Number and age profile of the speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including children (See suggestion for recognising children's languages in Early Childhood settings above, Figure 1; A self-assessment tool could be developed to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to record their level of language proficiency in their language(s). The languages children hear and interact in at home could be deduced from this information)
- Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak an Indigenous language (This could only be derived from the Census. In its current form this question does not indicate

proficiency, so this would can be interpreted as "speaks any amount of an Indigenous language"; not too that not all Census responses for Indigenous languages are tallied individually, due to gaps on the ASCL.)

Contextual information
- Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing Commonwealth funded language centres to maintain and preserve languages (Most languages are not serviced by a language centre - so this would not capture much of the activity in this space; new Indigenous contact languages are generally not catered for in language centres, nor funded through the ILA program; most language centres engage outwards, running programs with/in communities, and have not been geared necessarily towards access for individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so AIATSIS, public libraries, schools, community members, religious institutions, universities etc. are also sites of language activities; the wording "maintain and preserve" does not encompass the revival language context and the associated processes of researching, learning etc)

Disaggregation:
- Language data sets would typically be expected to contain information such as: whether a language is spoken as L1/mother tongue language, as L2/additional language, the level of proficiency/fluency of L2/additional languages, the language ecology - the extent to which various languages are used in people's lives: the frequency and/or the domains (home, family, out bush, at work, in school, accessing services, at the shops etc); the education/qualifications obtainable in languages, employment opportunities/remuneration etc)
- Traditional languages and new contact languages (Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole, Kriol and other creole and mixed languages). ("Kriol" is the name of one specific creole language spoken across a large part of northern Australia; "creole" is a kind of language with a particular history and multiple linguistic influences in its make-up)
- Language ecology (i.e. which type of language is the main language of communication in a location, which types are learned additionally) (see for example, Angelo et al 2019)
- Geographic area (jurisdiction, remoteness where possible)
- Strength of languages (according to Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) measures) including languages in the context of language retrieval/revival and maintenance (NB. "retrieval" is not a usual term in the context of language revival/re-awakening.)
- Note: The AIATSIS AUSTLANG database is a comprehensive list of traditional languages and varieties - and it has long term records of various sources of speaker numbers; it does not however record the outcomes of language revival work, and does not include all contact languages; NILS survey respondents are likely to report on languages being revived - less likely to report on strong languages, or on contact languages; the ABS ASCL is a partial list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages with fewer languages from revival contexts listed and also not up to date with contact languages
- Age - with young children: potentially a sign of intergenerational transmission, otherwise learning in education settings, but other data such as L1 or L2, language proficiency etc is necessary in order to understand age-related data.
- Gender
- People being employed for their language skills

Data Development
- Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being taught/transmitted/spoken in Aboriginal community settings and organisations, including Language Centres
- Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken in Aboriginal community settings, particularly in family life
- Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being taught in early-learning, primary and secondary schools, TAFE and university: levels of qualification obtainable

- Other demographic measures of people who speak an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, for example children's language backgrounds from Early Childhood or school enrolment (e.g. Figure 1), language speakers employed/remunerated for their language skills, language(s) used in the work place
- Other economic opportunities that arise for people who speak an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language
- Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages used in media
- Alternative indicators that demonstrate growth and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Definition and measures of cultural enterprises that are associated with language growth and development
- Number of people trained and employed as interpreters and translators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- Development of policies supporting the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's mother tongue/L1 (to promote language maintenance) in early childhood, school, university etc.

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