

The Hon. Julia Gillard
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for
Education, Minister for Social Inclusion
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

2 June 2010

Dear Deputy Prime Minister,

The Board and Directors of the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity wish to express our concern about recent developments in regards to Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). In a variety of roles, we have worked closely with Batchelor Institute for many years. We have great respect for all that the lecturers have been able to achieve, especially with the limited resources, and the impact that Batchelor graduates have had in their work with Australia's indigenous languages, many of which are highly endangered.

BIITE is Australia's only independent Indigenous tertiary education provider. While it operates predominantly in rural and remote parts of Northern Australia, Batchelor also draws its students nationally. The courses that Batchelor offers in the areas of languages, linguistics and education are unparalleled in Australia. BIITE has trained most of the Indigenous teachers working in remote communities in the NT. It is a tragedy that over the last few years the pressure for BIITE to be financially viable has led to a decrease in numbers of young Indigenous people from remote communities undertaking teacher training at BIITE. This has had, and is having, calamitous effects on the education of children in remote communities. When the present Government was in opposition, it promised to get more Indigenous teachers for the NT. It is important that these be local Indigenous people who understand what the children are saying. BIITE has an important role to play in this.

In its first year in office, the Rudd/Gillard government endorsed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We request you to pay careful consideration to Article 18:

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.;

and Article 19:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

We note too that Articles 13 and 14 of this document address the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain their languages and to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Batchelor Institute is *the* key educational institution in Australia which provides a pathway to support these rights.

In the light of these commitments, we call on you as the Minister for Education to ensure that proper consultation takes place with staff, students and the Indigenous communities that rely on Batchelor Institute to ensure that their communities have access to safe and culturally appropriate tertiary education, on facilities that provide the best possible opportunities to for indigenous students to commit to higher education and have a positive outcome that meets their aspirations and the expectations of their community.

We call on you as the Minister for Education to take the following steps to ensure that the Batchelor Institute is restructured in a way that provides the best possible educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

Recommendations:

- ✚ Engage in a comprehensive consultation process in accordance with the TOR as given to Korda Mentha in 2009.
- ✚ Engage in a comprehensive consultation process that includes dialogue with the Indigenous members of Council and the remote communities representing Batchelor Institute's students.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Margaret Florey
Director, RNLD

and Directors and Board members, RNLD

Dr Nick Thieberger, University of Melbourne
Ms Jeanie Bell, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Dr Anthony Jukes, University of Melbourne
Mr Kevin Lowe , Aboriginal Curriculum Unit, Office of the NSW Board of Studies
Mr Paul Paton, Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages
Dr Anne Poelina, Madjulla Inc., Western Australia
Dr Jane Simpson, Sydney University
Dr Alec Coupe, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Dr Toshihide Nakayama, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan
Dr Mark Turin, University of Cambridge, UK