



FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES

OVERVIEW

On February 5, 2019, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism tabled Bill C-91 in the House of Commons. The *Indigenous Languages Act* received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019. Sections 1 to 11, 13, 13.1, 16, 18 and 19 of the Act came into force on August 29, 2019. Sections 12, 14, 15, 17 and 20 to 49.1 of that Act will come into force on October 1, 2020 or, if a Commissioner is appointed before October 1, 2020, on the day on which the Commissioner is appointed. For a synopsis of the legislative process leading to the staged coming into force of the Act, please visit: <https://bit.ly/311lno9>.

The Legislative Co-development Table has reconvened as the Joint Implementation Steering Committee (JISC), with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, and the Department of Canadian Heritage meeting regularly. The current focus is on

the establishment of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages and the funding mechanisms resultant from Budget 2019.

Resolution 77/2017, *Support for Continued Co-Development Work on the Indigenous Languages Act*, was passed at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly (SCA) in December 2017. The Resolution provides further support for the joint development of an *Indigenous Languages Act* and identifies a set of 11 principles establishing the essential expectations of what legislation should address. The direction provided by these principles resulted in the development of a Technical Discussion Paper which will inform the drafting of legislation.

The Chiefs-in-Assembly also adopted Resolution 46/2018, *International Decade of Indigenous Languages*, to further international support for Indigenous language revitalization beyond 2019.

UPDATE

The selection process for the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages is being established. The Notice of Appointment Opportunity is expected to be published in the Canada Gazette and posted on the Governor in Council website by early February 2020.

Individuals interested in this Governor in Council opportunity must register for an account and build an online profile here: <https://bit.ly/2p17IGd>

The AFN Languages Sector has developed “A Guide to An Act respecting Indigenous languages: A Tool for First Nations Language

Revitalization”, which is to assist with next steps for First Nations regarding the legislation. It was launched at the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly on July 4-6, 2019, and is available on the AFN website at: <https://www.afn.ca/policy-sectors/languages-and-culture/>.

On September 18, 2019, Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild spoke to the United Nations in Geneva to call for an International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Promotion of the decade has been ongoing and would provide a

continuing international lens on the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act*.

The United Nations General Assembly committee (UNGA) adopted a resolution to proclaim the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The UNGA third committee will reconvene on November 14, 2019 and will then officially approve the resolution passed by the third-committee of UNGA.

NEXT STEPS

Currently, the AFN is working on an advocacy strategy and an implementation work plan. The work plan will be discussed in the next phase of the co-development process. The work plan will speak to many issues, including funding, education and lifelong learning, Indigenous language entities, Language Commissioner operationalization, intergovernmental cooperation, developing required policies and regulations among others.

The groundwork for legislative implementation must consider:

- The current context, in which national Indigenous language revitalization infrastructure does not exist.
- The need to coordinate the implementation of the Act, given the realities of First Nations languages as well as First Nations educational and cultural entities.
- The need to build significant capacity toward language revitalization, given the urgency born out of the decreasing numbers of fluent speakers.

- The need to fill gaps in information by collecting data on the status on Indigenous languages and conducting language assessments.
- The need to identify, strengthen and enhance existing Indigenous regional entities and to allow for the creation of such entities where they do not exist but are desired.
- The need to determine co-development processes and funding mechanisms for the effective and efficient implementation of the Act.
- The need to match the available resources to the language interventions and plans.
- The need to make financial resources available without delay, and to develop adaptable funding mechanisms to reflect language status as it changes over time.
- The need to establish a Commissioner’s office without delay. Interim work on infrastructure and funding will be determined on a bilateral or Co-development Working Group-basis as appropriate.

- The need to foster sharing of wise practices.

It is recommended that Nations begin working on Language plans, with consideration of connections with neighbouring Nations that share in their languages.

To receive more information about funding contribution agreements and proposals for language revitalization projects, contact: Charles Slowey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage, 819-994-1255 charles.slowey@canada.ca or Ellen Bertrand, Director, Aboriginal Affairs Directorate, Department of Canadian Heritage 819-997-6451 ellen.bertrand@canada.ca.

For negotiating an agreement under section 8 or 9 of the Act, contact: Stephen Gagnon, Director General, Aboriginal Affairs Directorate, Department of Canadian Heritage, stephen.gagnon@canada.ca

The AFN is also furthering work towards an International Decade of Indigenous Languages. As the United Nations proclaimed 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL), the AFN is advocating for legacy work through involvement in IYIL activities and high-level advocacy.

