

**FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES****OVERVIEW**

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On December 6, 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that the Government of Canada would jointly develop legislation for the revitalization and recovery of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages.

On June 14, 2017, Canadian Heritage, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and the Métis National Council (MNC) jointly announced the intention to work collaboratively to co-develop First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages legislation.

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**

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The AFN submitted a proposal document with the Technical Discussion Paper as part of the co-development process. Together these documents formed a working basis for the Memorandum to Cabinet with drafting instructions.

The Memorandum to Cabinet was accepted at the end of 2018. It was shared with the Department of Justice as part of the drafting

process. Indigenous representatives to the Co-development Working Group were invited to provide input to inform the drafting of the Bill. Canadian Heritage is continuing consultations with the AFN on an ongoing basis. The Bill is expected to be introduced into the House of Commons during the January 28-February 8, 2019 sitting session.

### NEXT STEPS

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After the Bill passes in the House of Commons it will proceed to the Senate. In both the House and the Senate, the proposed Bill will be studied and reviewed by the appropriate Committees. The intention remains for suitable legislation to be passed before the next federal election in 2019.

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 thoughts towards connections with neighbouring Nations that share in their languages.

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.