**Indigenous Languages of Victoria: Revival and Reclamation**

The Indigenous languages of Victoria form part of the Australian Language Family. They share similar features with other Australian Indigenous languages.

Over two hundred and fifty languages and even more language varieties were spoken in Australia prior to colonisation. Many of these languages are no longer in everyday use; some are spoken only for special purposes (such as ceremonies). Some exist only in manuscripts, some are ‘sleeping’ and some exist in name only. There may even be languages of which we no longer have any knowledge and which are unlikely to ever be reclaimed. This loss of Australia’s Indigenous linguistic heritage is a direct result of contact with English, despite the remarkable inventiveness of Indigenous Australians to withstand absorption of language and culture.

Language displacement and loss have particularly affected Victoria and Tasmania where Indigenous languages are no longer spoken as the primary means of communication. Even so, most Indigenous Victorians are aware of their language heritage, although some may recall only fragments of the language passed down over several generations since English settlement.

Indigenous Victorians have maintained their oral traditions when and where they can, despite continual removal and displacement. These oral traditions constitute the most important body of knowledge on the languages. Other material is available in local, state and national archives and libraries.

The history of the Victorian Indigenous people’s struggle to maintain their cultural heritage, language and identity is truly inspirational to most Australians. Their resourcefulness to withstand absorption of culture and the rebuilding of Indigenousness is remarkable. With the assistance of teachers and the Victorian Indigenous community, further progress can be a reality. Despite the history of suppressed Indigenous languages, many Victorian Indigenous people celebrate their survival and advocate strongly for their maintenance.

From the nineteenth century, written information about Indigenous languages was recorded by ‘protectors’, the clergy, squatters, police officers and other interested groups who were in contact with Aboriginal people. In the 1960s, for example, Luise Hercus recorded Indigenous Victorians on tape, speaking their languages.

More recently, Indigenous Victorians, together with linguists, have looked again at the material surviving for Victorian Indigenous languages. The following list indicates those languages (groups of languages) for which language material is currently available, and which could be the focus of the study. As reclamation work continues, it is anticipated that more languages will be added to the list.

Victorian Indigenous languages revival and reclamation must be taken seriously at this present time if Victorian Indigenous communities are to attain oracy and literacy in their Aboriginal languages, as well as English numeracy and literacy skills. There have been many lessons learnt from previous government reports and inquiries that identify the need for Victorian Indigenous languages to be taught in schools. These include the findings of the *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report* and the *Stolen Generations Report*, each of which addressed Indigenous social justices and equity.

The Indigenous languages of Victoria can be grouped as follows:

**1. Kulin Languages**

**Western Kulin** (North Western Victoria)

* Wemba Wemba (Swan Hill and Lake Boga)
* Barababaraba (Gunbower area)
* Madhi Madhi (Balranald area)
* Ladji Ladji (Mildura area)
* Wadi Wadi (Swan Hill)
* Wadi Wadi (Piangil)
* Wergaia (Wimmera)
* Djab Wurrung (Grampians)
* Dja Dja Wurrung (Loddon Valley)
* Jardwadjali (Upper Glenelg River)

**Eastern Kulin** (Melbourne and surrounds)

* Taungurung (Goulburn Valley – southern)
* Woiwurrung (Yarra Valley)
* Boon Wurrung (Coastal Melbourne and Westernport)

**Wadawurrung** (Geelong-Barwon Valley area)

**Gulidjan** (Lake Colac area)

**2.** **Gunditjmara/Warrnambool Language** (Warrnambool – Portland area)

* Dhauwurd Wurrung
* Keerray Woorroong
* Tyakoort Woorroong

**3. Buandig** (Mt Gambier area)

**4. Yorta Yorta, Yabula Yabula and Bangerang** (Murray Goulburn area)

**5. Dhudhuroa** (High Country/Victorian Alps)

**6. Pallanganmiddang** (Kiewa Valley area)

**7. Gunai/Kurnai (Gippsland area)**

* Bratowooloong (Corner Inlet area)
* Krowathunkooloong (Lake Tyers area)
* Brabuwooloong (Mitchell River)
* Tatungoloong (Gippsland Lakes)
* Brayakouloong (Latrobe River)