

NATIONAL WINNER

YEAR LEVEL 5-6



KOHBI BARROW

**SAINT CECILIA'S CATHOLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE

Wayiba, wayipa and hello (Ngarluma, Kariyarra and English languages).

I yarntala (write) in Nyangumarta and you may be able to parrjala (see it) and wurrala (say it) but do you truly understand the significance on how understanding language on warrarn (country) has made history matter for Native Title Claims?

Since the colonisation/invasion of Australia, Aboriginal culture and language wasn't regarded as important.

The Oxford Dictionary says that significance is: "the quality of being worthy of attention; importance". (Oxford Dictionary, 2021) Aboriginal people weren't treated important enough to vote or have a say on what was happening to their land.

The *Native Title Act 1993*, also known as Mabo's Law, has identified how significant Aboriginal languages are. A lot of Native Title claims have been successful based on proving the language connection to the country and why and how Aboriginal history matters, on country, when claiming.

"Language has been significant to the work of the anthropologists, historians, lawyers and judges who are involved in native title claims". (Language in Native Title 2020)

Even though it may seem like it should be easy to give the land back to the original owners "it took ten years, after Eddie Mabo's first speech in 1981, where he explained his people's beliefs about the ownership and inheritance of land on Murray Island, to become law". (Native Title 2021, Attorney General's Department)

"It all started when a lawyer heard the speech and asked Eddie if he would like to challenge the Australian Government through the court system to decide who the true owner of land on Murray Island was—his people or the Australian Government". (Native Title 2021, Attorney General's Department)

Mr Mabo unfortunately, died a few months before the law was made. "This decision was important as it introduced Australians to the significance of culture and the importance of restoring history". (Language in Native Title 2020) "As at 30 September 2015, native title has been recognised over approximately 2,469,647 km² or about 32% of the Australian land mass". (Native Title: Tenure 2021, Australian Trade and Investment Commission)

The significance of Language, is no different to what language means to non-Indigenous Australians and to anyone around the world. Language provides us with books and stories, records and information about who we are, what we do and how we do things and learn. It's our history and we learn about this in school.

The importance of preserving language is always increasing and Native Title helped collect this type of information. With more and more of the elders becoming spirits, it is becoming more and more important for languages to be preserved formally. This time it's not for Native Title but for all of us to learn about and remember Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

"Culture is Life: Language is part of Aboriginal culture and has been part of the decision making for Native Title Claims. Culture is what makes us whole. Culture is

our advantage. We must ensure the continuous reclamation of the stories, the languages, the revitalisations of song line and the dance, and the honouring of our cultural protocols and wisdom". (Culture is Life, 2021)

Native Title introduced many non-Indigenous Australians to Aboriginal languages; and more importantly the significance of their language and how is starting to make history matter in returning their land to them.

Native Title started with Eddie Mabo and, Native Title continues with the future and emerging leaders which people talk about when they do an 'Acknowledgement of Country'.

There are now very special organisations and ongoing opportunities to preserve language because language is significant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history matters.

In the Pilbara they specifically include:

- Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre
- Ngarluma Vocab Builder app for the Ngarluma language which came about because of the Language Conservancy and the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre
- 'Ngaarda Media', a radio station located in Roebourne, who do a Ngarluma 'word of the day'
- Josie Alec's YouTube channel about connection to country
- Pilbara Aboriginal Voices

And, right here in Hedland, where I live, the Aboriginal Strong Leaders group who includes, Ngarluma elder, Maureen Kelly, have recently spoken about the new Police Indigenous Language App. This allows Police to trial, in the Pilbara, a better way to communicate with our Aboriginal community so we can all walk in two worlds.

Aboriginal language is significant and what we do today and tomorrow will become our history. A better history.

"Such is the power of language to hurt or to heal". (I am Uluru, 2021) Language is significant and history matters because of language and its connection to Native Title claims.

I yarntala in Nyangumarta and you can now parrjala and wurrala as you read information to understand the historical significance about how language on warrarn has meant successful Native Title claims.

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