



NAIDOC Flag Raising Ceremony

3 July 2017

**The Hon Justice A Philippides
Court of Appeal**

I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and to Elders past and present and the community today.

I thank Uncle Joe Kirk, for his Welcome to Country. I also thank Stephen Mam Jnr for his wonderful speech. I acknowledge also the Murri Court Elders present and the other dignitaries and guests here today including, the Honourable Dr Anthony Lynham, Minister for State Development, Natural Resources and Mines, the Chief Magistrate Judge Rinaudo, Deputy Chief Magistrates Gardiner and O'Shea, Magistrate Hennessy and the acting Director-General Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Ms Jennifer Lang, the Executive Director of the Supreme District and Land Courts Service, Ms Julie Steel, and the Executive Director of Reform and Support Services, Ms Stephanie Attard. And I want also to acknowledge our talented Master of Ceremonies, Mr Justin Power, Indigenous Justice Officer, Courts Innovation Programs.

I am delighted that so many members of the legal community are present today on this very significant occasion. I specifically acknowledge the President of the Law Society of Queensland, Ms Christine Smyth, and Ms Anita Goon, one of the two newly appointed indigenous reconciliation plan co-ordinators, Mr Shane Duffy CEO of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, members of the Indigenous Lawyers Association of Queensland and the Community Justice Groups.

Today, on a stunningly beautiful Brisbane day, we gather in the forecourt, between the two magnificent buildings that house the State's Courts in Brisbane, to celebrate the beginning of NAIDOC Week, with the annual ceremony of the raising of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags alongside the Australian and Queensland flags. As Uncle



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Joe Kirk has reminded us, we gather at a place which has an enduring importance as part of sacred country.

The theme selected by NAIDOC this year, “Our languages matter”, is one of great importance to all Australians. That theme aims “to emphasis and celebrate the unique and essential role that Indigenous languages play in both cultural identity, linking people to their land and water, and in the transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, spirituality and rites, through story and song”.¹

The work of preservation, maintenance and revival of indigenous languages is one of utmost priority. Of the extraordinary number of distinct indigenous languages which have existed on this continent, very many no longer remain in daily use, and of those that do, many are considered highly endangered.

Preservation, revival and promotion of indigenous languages is of especial importance for an indigenous culture where knowledge is handed down orally from generation to generation. It is the means of passing on cultural memory. It is the means by which the great ancient stories at the heart of the cultural identity of our First Nations’ peoples are imparted; the stories of the Dreamtime and the Songlines by which the landscape is known and navigated. I was moved to read the eloquent words of the renowned indigenous playwright and theatre director, Mr Wesley Enoch, who described the loss of language as “the loss of the ability to describe the landscape ... and your place in it.”²

Indigenous language is not only essential to identity and a sense of cultural belonging, it is the means of passing on indigenous knowledge and learning. The preservation of language is therefore also fundamental to the preservation of the unique learning and

¹ <http://www.naidoc.org.au/2017-national-naidoc-theme>

² The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, *Submission 139* at 2, quoted in Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, House of Representatives, *Our Land Our Languages* (2012) at 9.



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knowledge of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that comes from an extraordinary continuous lived experience of tens of thousands of years on this continent and surrounding islands. The knowledge of our First Nations' peoples that has been handed down orally over the millennia represents a vast encyclopaedic resource. That knowledge has been generously shared to provide benefits for all Australians in many important ways; such as in land and water management, fire control and in the special uses and values of native plants, to mention just a few examples.

The preservation of indigenous language is the preservation of an ancient cultural treasure that enriches us all.

There are a number of important initiatives that have been undertaken, particularly in recent times to preserve and revitalise indigenous languages. Today we acknowledge the important work being carried out through many programs and community groups to ensure that indigenous language, and through language, indigenous culture and knowledge will be imparted to new generations.

To all of you present, I say – in recognition of this year's NAIDOC theme and echoing Uncle Joe Kirk's words that we are all one under the southern sky – in languages that have been spoken in this very place for millennia:

In the Turrabul language, "*Kunnar mallera ngalingi*," and

In the Jagera language, "*Ngali yagarr ganarri*"

meaning "let us be one."