

Language Sovereignty First Nations Languages Conference

21 to 23 October 2025

Kalgoorlie WA

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First Nations Conference in Kalgoorlie: Advocating for State Language Legislation

The Goldfields Aboriginal Languages Centre Aboriginal Corporation (GALCAC) hosted a significant First Nations language conference in Kalgoorlie from 21 to 23 October 2025. The conference, themed *Language Sovereignty: Reclaim the Rights*, aimed to highlight the importance of sovereignty and recognition for the 85 First Nations languages of Western Australia.

The event was officially opened by the Hon. Don Punch, WA State Minister, with Ali Kent MLA also in attendance. Over the three days, the conference brought together a dynamic group comprising language speakers, linguists, and other professionals committed to First Nations language use, preservation, and documentation from across Western Australia and interstate.

Key Resolutions and Conference Outcomes

At the conclusion of the conference, delegates issued a strong call for action, including:

- Formal recognition that the sovereignty of Western Australia's 85 First Nations languages has never been ceded, and a request for this to be acknowledged through the enactment of Western Australian Aboriginal Languages Legislation.
- Legislative recognition of these 85 First Nations languages as the State's first languages.
- Commitment to equitable State resourcing for every language, ensuring their ongoing vitality, safety, and transmission to future generations.

Central to these resolutions was a call for legislation similar to the *New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*, as a model for Western Australia. GALCAC CEO, Sue Hanson, delivered an address detailing the current state of language sovereignty in Western Australia, revealing widespread surprise among attendees that WA First Nations languages are not yet formally recognised.

Conference Highlights and Presentations

The conference featured several keynote addresses and presentations. Professor Peter Austin from London delivered a global perspective on Indigenous language sovereignty. Peter-Lucas Jones from New Zealand inspired delegates with insights into the development of Māori language digital tools grounded on principles of language sovereignty.

Presenters from seven national bodies engaged attendees on a range of vital topics, including the National Indigenous Language Policy Partnership and

pathways for interpreter accreditation through NAATI, the national accreditation authority. Additionally, Alison Vaughan from the Victorian Herbarium shared insights into language materials discovered in herbarium archives dating back 150-200 years, offering delegates new opportunities to recover and revitalise highly endangered languages.

GALCAC holds a conference every second year with the next scheduled for 19-21 October 2027 in Kalgoorlie.

Further Information

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