



Australian Hellenic Council (NSW)

A coordinating body for the Australian Hellenic community

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The Australian Hellenic Council serves as the peak public affairs body of the Australian Hellenic community, seeking to bring together community organisations on a select range of issues of concern to Australian Hellenes countrywide. The teaching of foreign languages (including Classical and Modern Hellenic) in Australian primary, secondary and tertiary institutions is one such issue of concern.

In a statement in March 2008, the Federal Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard, announced that the National Curriculum will include a languages curriculum from 2011. The Australian Hellenic Council agrees with the Federal Government's assessment that it is concerning that only thirteen per cent of Year 12 students in this country study a foreign language.ⁱ **The Australian Hellenic Council believes that part of the solution to the crisis in the study of for-**

foreign languages at secondary and tertiary level is for the learning of a foreign language to be made compulsory for all primary and secondary students across Australia.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Group of Eight Universities have all called for greater emphasis on the teaching of foreign languages. The Australian Federal Police, the Australian Defence Force and non-government aid organisations continue to cry out for multilingual personnel. This issue was also raised in The Flood Report on intelligence.ⁱⁱ

In an increasingly globalised economy, where knowledge of multiple languages and cultures is growing in importance in a myriad of professions, "There is plenty of anecdotal and research evidence that we are failing to pursue all the alternatives we can in

trade to do business with those willing to speak their language", as John Byron, Director, Australian Academy of the Humanities stated.ⁱⁱⁱ

While primary and secondary education remains largely a state-territory responsibility, the AHC's proposal can be incorporated into the long-term reform agenda of education in Australia. The Rudd Labour government has made major commitments to schools, providing support for technology, infrastructure and curriculum. The AHC believes that this support should be extended to teaching foreign languages.

The National Curriculum should include compulsory education in a foreign language alongside subjects such as English, Science and Australian History. The 2007 Attitudes Towards the Study of Languages in Australian Schools report produced for the Australian Parents Council and the

Australian Council of State School Organisations has called for the creation of dedicated classrooms for language lessons and a promotional campaign to resurrect language study in Australian schools. The AHC endorses "incentive programs to recruit and retain language teachers".^{iv}

The issue of foreign language education goes beyond the study of a particular verbal communication. Integral to the study of a particular language is the study, and understanding, of the cultural context that developed that language. Diplomats, defence personnel, police, business and non-government organisation people who guide Australian government policy all have knowledge of languages and cultures beyond our shores. These skills are increasingly in demand as Australia develops, amongst other things, a diaspora of its own.

Australia is home to approximately 750,000 people of Hellenic descent, drawn from a dozen different countries around the world, especially the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Cyprus, Egypt and the former Soviet Union. According to the 2006 Census, some 150,000 Australian citizens were permanent residents of the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of Cyprus. The Australian Federal Police has maintained a small contingent in the United Nations' Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) since 1964.

These crimson ties that bind are rapidly being converted into strong financial relationships as bilateral trade and investment continues to develop.

The preferred method of cultivating these, and similar relations with other countries with strong diaspora communities in Australia, is to promote foreign language learning here. Parents, principals and other stakeholders in Australian education need to be reminded that the Federal Government thinks that the study of the rest of the world is important.

There would be no better way of closing 2008 – the United Nations' International Year of Languages – than with the introduction of foreign language education as a formal part of the National Curriculum.

Prepared by Dr Panayiotis Diamadis Ph.D., AHC (NSW) Secretary, October 2008

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Kladakis, Catherine "Gillard pushes for second language studies" *Neos Kosmos English Weekly* 31 March 2008, 2

ⁱⁱ Jeffrey, Robin "Ignorance as a second language" *The Australian* 8 June 2007, 18

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith, Terry "No Compende?" *The Sun-Herald* 3 June 2007, 44

^{iv} Edwards, Hannah "Wake-up call for teaching of languages" *The Sun-Herald* 29 April 2007, 33

Xenophon unhappy with emissions scheme

A key crossbench senator has signalled he has major concerns with the design of the Rudd government's emissions trading scheme. The opposition and the Australian Greens agreed on terms of reference for a Senate inquiry into the legislation on Monday.



Climate Change Minister Penny Wong released draft legislation for the scheme on Tuesday. On the eve of the draft legislation's release, independent senator Nick Xenophon said a January research trip to Canada and the United States confirmed his concerns about the scheme's design.

"I have got a very real concern about the design of this particular scheme," he told ABC TV.

"I am concerned we need to get the right model, the right approach so that we can maximise the targets without adversely impacting the economy."

Senator Xenophon said the Senate needed to ensure the design for the emissions trading scheme was right.

"The design of an ETS will be one of the biggest decisions the parliament will make in many years - much bigger than the GST, much bigger than a whole range of other economic reforms," he said.

"If we don't have the right design, if we have a scheme

that is overly bureaucratic, where there is a lot of churn of revenue, where there are flaws in the design, then I think we need to be very vigilant on that."

Opposition emissions trading design spokesman Andrew Robb and Australian Greens climate change spokeswoman Christine Milne on Monday struck a deal on the terms of reference for a Senate inquiry.

The terms of reference will need to be ratified by the coalition's Senate party room. A new Senate select committee on climate policy would conduct the inquiry, to be chaired by the opposition and deputy chaired by the Greens. "The terms of reference will be broad enough to allow a proper investigation into the scientific adequacy of the scheme and its targets," Senator Milne told AAP. The inquiry would also look at the design of the emis-

sions trading scheme, and if it would effectively transform Australia into a green economy.

It would be due to report at the end of budget week in May.

Treasurer Wayne Swan withdrew a proposed lower house inquiry into the emissions trading scheme last month.

The opposition argues an emissions trading scheme should not begin until 2011 or 2012.

Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull has said a carbon tax was another measure that could form part of the climate policy toolbox.