

## AUSTRALIAN HELLENIC COUNCIL

# A RESPONSE TO THE VICTORIAN LANGUAGES STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER GREEK IN VICTORIA

**PART B**

We propose:

(a) a Language Map to be developed on Victoria

(b) The place of the new Language Centres in Victorian Schools to take into consideration the socio-economic and demographic changes of ethnic communities.

2. Sociolinguistic research (Tamis and Gauntlett, 1993; Clyne, 1982; Bianco, 1987) demonstrated that to learn Greek you need at least 2,600 contact hours of teaching, that is, almost six contact hours per week. Currently the policy requirement for quality teaching in Victoria is a minimum of 150 minutes per week of instruction taught by qualified language teacher. However, according to research the actual average period of instructions for Greek does not exceed even 80 minutes per week. This is a gross inadequacy given the almost zero frequency of teaching in most Victorian government schools.

We propose:

(a) The required minimum of teaching to be increased to 240 minutes from Preps to Year Six and to 220 from Year 7 to year 10.

(b) The frequency of teaching to be increase to two days per week.

(c) Schools should implement streaming procedures based on the language competence, language adequacy and language achievement of the students.

3. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) should review the VCE assessment procedures for Greek as well as its VCE syllabus adopting a more flexible unit system taking provision for beginners and advanced students. VCAA should realize that the current student intake in Greek language classes is either non-Greek background students or 3rd and 4th generation English monolinguals. These factors and the low quality of language learning experience obtained in school as a result of insufficient time and frequency of teaching are impacting on students' attitudes and motivation. If this anomaly will not be eradicated, the current margin level of language attrition from 92% in Year 7 to only 17% in Year 10, will further increase.

**We propose:**

The monolithic VCE curriculum should be replaced with a syllabus taking provision for beginners and advanced students.

4. Whilst 44% of the people in Victoria were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas, there are only 13 schools providing language immersion classes for 7.5 hours per week. The learning of curriculum content in and through another language is the most affective way of language learning, in addition to the best way of improving language proficiency, general cognitive functioning and overall academic achievement. Fur-



thermore, Victoria is the best State in Australia to offer students more real-world language experiences outside the classroom, as it stands a vivid language laboratory. We believe that in addition to the Northern suburbs of Metropolitan Melbourne (Lalor/Epping/Thomastown), there are even stronger concentrations of Greek Australians in Northcote (15% of the total population) and Oakleigh (23% of the total). The establishment of Greek immersion classes within the structure of the new Language Centres in those suburbs will benefit Victoria and the nation.

**We propose:**

The establishment of two additional Greek bilingual immersion schools in Northcote/Thornbury area and Oakleigh.

5. The lack of a Language Map in Victoria further inhibits the continuity of Greek language teaching and learning between primary and post primary schools in any given area. Research has found that there are grave problems in linkage between and continuity within government primary and secondary schools with reference to Greek language courses. Learning a language requires effort over a long period of time, however, most students of Greek are unable to continue the language that they studied at primary school when they reach Year 7. The interruption of their studies has a negative impact on their motivation and overall achievement. The issue of continuity is often related to the insufficient numbers of students and/or difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers in Greek. The robust Greek community may have a role to play here by means of collaboration with the State in assisting with teachers' training schemes and establishing links between the schools offering the subject of Greek and the Greek community.

We propose:

(a) Create a Language Map improving continuity and pathways and ensuring that students will have access to Greek language teaching and learning from

Preps to Year 10.

(b) The establishment of a Permanent Greek Language Committee to link government schools with the Greek community to assist with the teachers' training schemes, with the provision of resources including real-world language experience outside the classroom.

(c) A greater range of certification of proficiency and entry/re-entry points to learning Greek is needed.

6. Retention and attrition should be also considered as the outcome of successful teaching. Research has found that Greek is being taught in most primary schools in Victoria by non-specialist teachers, whilst some teachers need to be trained for a more adequate command of the language. We believe that the teaching capacity will be augmented with the appointment of specialist teachers in Primary schools. Inflexible curricula and assessment mechanisms and inability to cope with mixed language ability groups using appropriate materials and methods are issues related to teachers' composition mechanisms. Furthermore, we also believe that current specialist teachers of Greek need to be re-trained both in language methods as well as for their command of Greeks.

**We propose:**

(a) Teachers' training sessions should be undertaken under the supervision of Community Languages Victoria for all those who are teaching in both primary and post-primary Greek language classes.

(b) Teachers and their students should be provided with real opportunities to communicate in Greek both inside and outside their classrooms utilizing the vast community resources.

5.0 Why Greek as part of the Victorian languages strategy

Greek does not simply derive its significance only as a community language or as the norm of the Greek-speaking sector of the Australia community, which is vigorously organized, politically robust and strongly committed to maintenance of its Hellenic Australian identity.

The significance of Greek for Australia derives principally from heritage, moral, intellectual and utilitarian reasons:

Moral and intellectual, because Greek is the only extant Heritage Language of the Western World known and used in Australia;

Utilitarian, because of an established presence of a vast number of Greek-speaking residents (currently estimated to 600,000) and of many more thousands of Australians with ancestral, sentimental, professional, cultural and intellectual ties with Greece, Cyprus and the millions of Hellenes in the Diaspora.

Whence, the linguistic World Heritage

status of Greek is illustrated by a number of aspects outlined below, which inevitably propagate its imperative importance to be included in the Australian national curriculum of languages other than English:

A. Greek is the oldest and sole survival of ancient European languages bearing a linguistic tradition of 4,000 years. It has been the basis of the European civilization and naturally has fundamentally affected other languages and cultures.

B. Greek remained the language of global civilization from 480 BC to A.D. 1500 in both oral and written forms and was the official vernacular of the entire Hellenized world from Western Europe to India. Hence, the general use of Greek was of enormous importance to the spread of Christianity.

C. Greek is the sole modern descendant of the Indo-European family of languages, in which fundamental texts of Western Civilization and Christian scripture were formulated and transmitted through the ages. Even in 21st century Greek-speaking Patriarchates in Constantinople (Istanbul), Jerusalem, Alexandria, Cyprus and Greece commemorate the thousand years of Greek presence in Europe, Asia and Africa.

D. Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodox were the two Christian worlds in Europe and Asia. The entire world of Greek Christians, incorporating the Russians, Rumanians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Macedoslavs, and Syro-Lebanese used Greek as their official language of liturgy and sermons.

E. Greek is designated as one of the five official languages of the European Union and is rated as a major world-language in spite of the comparatively modest number of its current native speakers.

F. Greek composed by reputed individuals of intellect such as Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, Hippocrates, the Great fathers of the Christian Church, the great hymnographers, philologists, mathematicians, physicians, anthropologists, ethnologists. Naturally, the notions born herein, expressed through the words of the Greek language, pervaded the languages and the civilizations of the world and left eternal mark on what is known as the European Civilization. Studying the Greek language is not a product of fashion or of utilitarian motives. It has its origins in man's desire to study the great texts about great issues.

G. Approximately, 28,000 English words including key words such as idea, theory, system, analysis, synthesis, category, hierarchy, method, hypothesis, myth, poetry, drama, music, harmony, politics, democracy, thence, machine, episteme, psyche, Eros, ecclesia, Christ,