

LANGUAGE AND THE LAW III

Getting the Message:

Aboriginal Interpreter Services in Central Australia, 1980 – 2000¹

ABSTRACT

On 1 July 1983 Australia's first Aboriginal interpreter service was launched on the sniff of an oily rag by the Institute for Aboriginal Development at Alice Springs. In its early days the service faced formidable challenges, but it laid the foundation for the establishment of a properly funded Territory-wide service established in 2000. This paper sketches the history of Aboriginal interpreting over this period in Central Australia.

I was prompted to prepare this paper by Acting Justice Dean Mildren, who almost exactly a year ago today, on 3 April 2018, in this very room, delivered a paper on the history of Aboriginal interpreting to a Symposium to honour an early Central Australian pioneer of interpreting, Professor TGH Strehlow. I regret to inform you that Justice Mildren's paper contained a flaw: he failed to do justice to the contribution of another champion of Aboriginal interpreting in the Northern Territory, namely Dean Mildren, or, to use the name conferred on him by a specially constituted court that sat in judgement on him in Darwin on 25 May 2012, Mudskipperface. Let's correct that omission now: both on and off the bench, Acting Justice Mildren has tirelessly and creatively worked to pave the way towards a Northern Territory justice system in which interpreters take their rightful place.

And this is a good time too to acknowledge the remarkable pioneering work of the first crop of interpreters trained at the Institute for Aboriginal Development here in Alice Springs back in the 1980s. I was delighted to participate in a small ceremony in May 2018 in which a special NAATI Certificate honouring the founding members of the then embryonic profession of Australian Indigenous language interpreters was presented to Margaret Kemarre Turner, Myra Ah Chee, Christobel Swan, Lorna Wilson, Lena Taylor, Margaret Heffernan, Rosalie Kunoth Monks, Valda Shannon, Kumalie Rylie and Veronica Perrurle Dobson. And on a personal note, on this list of distinguished people were several who first welcomed me to this rich desert country. I respectfully thank you, and all the Mparntwe Arenye, including those among my cherished students and workmates who, I am sorry to say, have passed on.

Justice Mildren's paper stretched back to the nineteenth century, and forward to the twenty first. My focus is much narrower, just twenty years, but it is a particularly important period because it covers the birth of Aboriginal interpreting as a profession in Australia. Justice Mildren didn't go into much detail about this in his survey, but that is hardly surprising: accounts of Aboriginal interpreting in those years are sparse. I want to flesh out that bony record.

¹ Thanks to Veronica Perrurle Dobson, Lizzie Marrkilyi Ellis, Maya Cifali, John Henderson and Jodie Clarkson for reviewing drafts of this paper, and for their helpful suggestions. Any errors are solely attributable to the author.

And in doing so, I argue that there are two key lessons to be learnt from examining this history, which are perhaps just two sides of the same coin, a coin that is familiar to observers of the broader field of Australian Indigenous-settler relations. The first lesson is this: although the contribution of people like TGH Strehlow and Dean Mildren has been important over the years, the driving force for the development of Aboriginal interpreting services has been from anangu, tyerrtye mape, yapa, yolngu, in other words, native speakers of Aboriginal languages. There is an obvious but nonetheless profoundly important reason for this: at stake is the survival of *their* languages, *their* identity. The second lesson, a corollary of the first, is that despite the fact that both Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments did – eventually – stump up the funds required to get Aboriginal interpreter services off the ground, they did so grudgingly, stingily and only when it became politically and legally expedient to do so. Along the way, governments acted with wilful blindness, callous disregard and outright bad faith to avoid their responsibilities to a substantial portion of the public they had been elected to serve. As with land rights, over-incarceration, stolen generations redress, recognition of prior sovereignty and so many other issues, progress is only achieved after protracted, strenuous, patient struggle.

These two key lessons lead to a third, and that is the lesson of vigilance. Having learnt from this history, we know that it is on the cards that some future governments will behave like those past governments, and seek to undermine Aboriginal interpreter services. Accordingly, supporters of Aboriginal interpreter services should always firmly bear this unattractive but readily foreseeable possibility in mind.

You might think it is a bit melodramatically over the top of me to claim that the development of Aboriginal interpreter services has been nothing less than a fight for linguistic survival, but that is what I believe, and here is an illustration of why I believe it. On 17 August 1999, during Denis Burke's term as Chief Minister and Attorney-General of the Northern Territory, the Legislative Assembly debated a Matter of Public Importance, the Report by Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Dawn Lawrie of her *Inquiry into the Provision of an Interpreter Service in Aboriginal Languages by the Northern Territory Government*. In the course of that debate, the Chief Minister made his government's position crystal clear:

The government invests considerable amounts of money in education for Aboriginals. Most Aboriginals, certainly most of the young men who dominate the statistics of Aboriginal appearances before the courts, have been through the school system. They have received – or have been provided with the opportunity to receive – ten years of free education in learning English. The school-based learning of English is reinforced by the all pervasive dominance of English on television, in cinemas, on videos and in papers, magazines, etc. It is quite surprising to me that the young men appearing in courts have picked up so little English along the way.

The situation of Australian born citizens is different from overseas born immigrants who may arrive in Australia with no exposure to English. It is not unreasonable for the Northern Territory government to focus its main effort on the teaching of English in schools rather than the provision of Aboriginal languages interpreter services. The provision of interpreter services as a long-

term solution, to my mind, is the equivalent of providing a wheelchair to a person who has not learned to walk. It is not an appropriate long-term solution.

The wheelchair analogy says it all: the official view at the time in the Territory was that unless you have also mastered English, clinging to your ancestral language, your mother-tongue (just like clinging to your ancestral homelands, laws and ceremonies, but they are other topics, for another day) is a self-imposed handicap, a disability, a deficit, a defect. One way of remedying this purported defect would be to seriously commit to a properly resourced bilingual education system, but no Northern Territory government has ever done that. The only other way of fixing this supposed defect is to discourage the use of ancestral languages. If those languages cease to be used, the inevitable consequence will be their death.

We should be grateful to Mr Burke for coming clean. His 1999 speech vividly and frankly explains why, for the previous twenty years, Northern Territory governments had so consistently and vigorously acted to prevent Aboriginal interpreter services from getting their foot in the door.

That's where our story – almost – ends. But now it's time to go back to the beginning.

You've probably all heard of the remarkable Yankunytjatjara leader, Yami Lester. Because he'd lost his sight as a youngster, he was sent down to the Blind Institute in Adelaide, where he learnt two things: making brooms, and speaking English. After a few years he got bored with broomology, to use the word he playfully invented, and in about 1967 he took up interpreting instead, first in Port Augusta, and then, from 1970, in Alice Springs, where a mentor of Yami's, the Reverend Jim Downing, had just started the Institute for Aboriginal Development, IAD, with Uniting Church funding. There was as yet no Aboriginal Legal Aid in the Territory, and Yami operated as a one man interpreter service for about five years, which must have been a godsend to those of his countrymen who were in trouble.

During the Whitlam era, when radical changes in Aboriginal affairs were afoot, with Jim Downing's encouragement Yami ventured down south to spread the word. He delivered a paper titled "Aborigines in the Court" to the influential 1973 *Aborigines, Human Rights and the Law* conference in Sydney, and he delivered another such paper the following year at Monash University in Melbourne. He'd planted a seed.

By 1978, four important ducks had been conveniently lined up. Firstly, in Alice Springs, IAD had begun to attract interest in the development and delivery of language services: there were Pitjantjatjara classes, linguists were getting involved, and the Institute even got a grant of \$4,500 to build a language laboratory. Secondly, agencies such as the School of Australian Linguistics at Batchelor College and the Summer Institute of Linguistics had started to develop and deliver vernacular literacy resources and programs for, among other things, Aboriginal trainee teachers working in bi-lingual education in remote communities. Thirdly, there was a growing national awareness of the disadvantaged circumstances of Indigenous people in remote parts of the Northern Territory, following the events that led to the passage of the Northern Territory's land rights laws in 1976, and the grant of self-government to the Territory a couple of years later. And fourthly, following the unplanned arrival of boatloads of non-English

speaking refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the Commonwealth commissioned Frank Galbally QC to undertake a major Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants. The Galbally Report marked a watershed in that by implementing its recommendations, for the first time an Australian Government embraced multiculturalism as a key Federal policy.

One of the Galbally initiatives was the establishment of an inter-Departmental Planning Group on Special Interpreter and Translator Needs, and that in turn led the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to commission his Department to conduct the first research study into the need for interpreter and translation services in the Northern Territory, where it appeared that the need might be greatest. The job was assigned to a senior researcher within the Department, Gloria Brennan, a Ngaanyatjarra-Wangkatja woman from Leonora who was an academic and activist, and also, like Yami Lester, a pioneering Aboriginal interpreter.

Brennan reported that “that there was an urgent need for better interpreting and translation services for Aboriginals”. She methodically dealt with the key practical issues of interpreter training, accreditation, remuneration and career structure. Perhaps even more importantly, Brennan also eloquently explained the underlying rationale for Aboriginal interpreters: the fundamental links between language, land and identity; the unequal power structures that distort communications between Aboriginal people and agents of the state; the pressing need and fundamental right for Aboriginal people not proficient in standard English to have their authentic voice properly heard.

Over the next twenty years, Brennan’s conclusions were repeated with monotonous regularity, in at least eleven separate, weighty reports, the cost of which dwarfed what would have been required to actually set up and properly resource an Aboriginal interpreter service for the Northern Territory.

For the record, there were the following inquiries, in chronological order:

1. The 1981 Inter-Departmental Working Party into Aboriginal interpreter services for the NT, with representatives from both NT and Commonwealth governments, and community organisations, about more of which below.
2. The 1986 Australian Law Reform Commission Report of its Inquiry into Recognition of Customary Law, which recommended support and extension of training and accreditation of Aboriginal interpreters.
3. The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which recommended that legislation be enacted in all Australian jurisdictions to provide that a court be obliged not to continue to hear a case unless an Aboriginal defendant unable to fully understand the proceedings in English is provided with an interpreter. The Commission also recommended measures be taken to train and employ Aboriginal people as court interpreters. All Australian governments formally committed to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations.
4. The 1992 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs report *Language and Culture – A Matter of Survival*, which recommended that ATSIC establish “a separate national Interpreter service for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages... a network service utilising existing ATSI language resources would be most appropriate”.

5. The 1994 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry, which found that the Royal Commission recommendations on interpreting had not been implemented by the NT, and recommended that the NT implement them.
6. The 1994 Sackville Report on Access to Justice, which addressed the need for Aboriginal legal interpreting.
7. The 1995 ATSIC Report to government on native title social justice measures, titled *Recognition Rights and Reform*, which recommended that the Commonwealth Government commit “to the provision of an adequate Indigenous language interpreting and translating service with a particular emphasis in ensuring effective communication within the criminal justice system.”
8. The 1995 Consultancy Report *An Aboriginal Language Interpreter Service* by Peter Carroll to the Northern Territory Office of Aboriginal Development, in furtherance of the government’s 1994 election undertaking to “develop a technical interpreter/translator service within all service delivery Departments, commencing with Health and Community Services and Education”.
9. The 1996 NT Office of Aboriginal Development *Interpreters and Translators in Aboriginal Languages Action Plan*, which was “premised on the fact that the lack of interpreters in the legal system must be addressed as a priority”.
10. The 1999 Report by Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Dawn Lawrie, *Inquiry into the Provision of an Interpreter Service in Aboriginal Languages by the Northern Territory Government*, which recommended that the establishment of a Northern Territory Government interpreter service “be accorded the highest priority”.
11. And finally, the 2000 Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs *Inquiry into the Human Rights (Mandatory Sentencing of Juvenile Offenders) Bill 1999*, which recommended that “An appropriately resourced interpreter service must be a high priority for the Northern Territory”.

To this list one could add the major Queensland Criminal Justice Commission 1996 report into the problems faced by Aboriginal witnesses in Queensland courts, as well as at least four substantial reports and discussion papers between 1978 and 1995 dealing with the associated issue of Aboriginal interpreter training; and numerous articles published by jurists, academics, Aboriginal people and organisations calling for the provision of Aboriginal interpreting services and in particular, legal interpreting services.

As all these discussion papers, inquiries, reports and action plans appeared to be in furious agreement that Aboriginal interpreter services were an urgent priority, one might be forgiven for thinking that a great deal was actually being done. One would be mistaken.

If 1978 was the year when the ducks were lined up, 1980 was the year when the ducks were being shoved and the buck was being passed. Riding the wave of enthusiasm generated by the Brennan Report, IAD sought and obtained Commonwealth funding to establish an Interpreter Training Program: it made good sense to first develop a skilled core of workers, and later set up a scheme to put them to work. But when it

came to getting government commitment to establish an actual interpreter service, the excuses piled up.

Perhaps the most common was the “not my problem” excuse. The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which you will recall had produced the Brennan Report, was quick to reiterate its in principle support for the establishment of an Aboriginal interpreter service, but just as quick to point out that it had no available funds to contribute. They suggested IAD approach the Northern Territory Government.²

Similarly, the Northern Territory Minister for Education supported “the idea” of an interpreter service, but ominously added “the establishment of an Aboriginal Interpreter Service would need to be a policy decision of the Northern Territory Government”.³

Then there was the “too hard basket” excuse: Northern Territory Chief Minister Paul Everingham wrote to IAD saying that it was “a very complicated issue”. And the “maybe it’s not really a problem at all” excuse. Everingham also suggested that “Aborigines may not want an interpreter for fear of misrepresentation by other clan members”.⁴ And finally, falling back on the tried and true “not my problem” excuse, Everingham suggested that IAD approach the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Meanwhile, back in Canberra, officers in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs considered that Aboriginal *interpreter* services were the responsibility of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, whereas officers of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs took the view that *Aboriginal* interpreter services were the province of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Eventually, in August 1980, IAD was invited to join a Working Party set up by the Chief Minister’s Department. The Working Party conducted a further survey of the need for an Aboriginal Interpreter Service, which confirmed that the service was needed. The Working Party produced a draft report recommending the establishment of the nation’s first Aboriginal interpreter service, to be based at and run by IAD. That draft, however, never saw the light of day, and was replaced by a watered down version several months later prepared without the prior involvement or even knowledge of IAD, and which stopped short of recommending that anything specific actually be done. This was a highly effective piece of governmental stonewalling skulduggery, and rather remarkably, as we shall see, it was to be repeated 15 years later.

Having realised that neither the incumbent Federal or Territory government was going to come to its aid, IAD lobbied the Federal Opposition, in the hope that there would be a change of leaders and a change of policy, and secured from then Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Senator Susan Ryan a commitment to provide Federal funding for an Aboriginal Interpreter Service at IAD – if her party got elected.

² Letter from DAA to IAD, 29 February 1980

³ Letter from Jim Robertson MLA to IAD, 3 March 1980

⁴ Letter from Paul Everingham MLA to IAD, 20 March 1980

And lo and behold, in March 1983 it came to pass with the election of the first Hawke government. In the month following his appointment as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Clyde Holding MP flew to Alice Springs and met with local Aboriginal organisations – I was excited to be in the room – to announce that Labor would honour its election promises to them. And so, on 30 May 1983 IAD received a grant to establish the country's first pilot Aboriginal Interpreter Service. IAD issued invitations to the launch in Arrernte, Warlpiri, Warumungu, Pitjantjatjara – and English.

It was a pittance – funds to employ a co-ordinator, and purchase a sedan – but it was a start. Running this sniff-of-an-oily-rag service proved to be extremely difficult. The AIS was not funded to employ any interpreters, and was expected to operate on a fee-for-service basis. Unsurprisingly, no-one wanted to pay the fee. In that first year, 1983, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which had funded the fledgling service, used it only once, to translate the Minister's Christmas card. Even though the Northern Territory judiciary had strongly supported the establishment of the service, IAD was rarely called on to provide interpreters for court or the police station. Even our good friends the CAALAS lawyers were often very recalcitrant, and I recall getting up the nose of a forthright young fellow named Jon Tippett in the body of the magistrates court one morning by telling him how to do his job. Without regular work, the interpreters didn't get the practical experience they needed to develop their skills, and several of them took up other job opportunities offering reliable income. Consequently, IAD was often unable to supply interpreters up to the task when needed, which in turn eroded the confidence of clients in the capacity of the AIS to deliver a quality service.

Those first few years were a slow, hard grind, but by 1990 the service had hit its stride, in large part because IAD had by this time greatly expanded its language services, which now included dictionary projects in several languages, well-attended language classes both for adults and in local schools, cross-cultural courses and assorted research projects. The IAD Language Centre's collective expertise and strong morale proved to be an invaluable resource for the interpreter service. In addition, other local Aboriginal organisations became important clients of the service. One of these was CAAMA, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, which engaged the AIS to produce translations and sub-titles for its broadcasts.

The service's first co-ordinator was Veronica Perrurle Dobson, then a recent graduate of IAD's newly NAATI-accredited Level II Interpreter Training Program. Veronica went on to a distinguished career as the co-author with John Henderson of the Eastern and Central Arrernte to English Dictionary, among numerous other scholarly publications, for which she was honoured by being made a Member of the Order of Australia.

One of Veronica's successors as co-ordinator of the AIS at IAD was Christobel Swan, who has been recently acknowledged as a NAIDOC "Language Champion" for her pioneering work to save her mother-tongue, Pertame, a southern Arandic language on the verge of extinction.

Another of the service's co-ordinators was the remarkable Ngaatjatjarra interpreter, educator and linguist, Lizzie Marrkilyi Ellis, who has followed in the footsteps of her remarkable countrywoman Gloria Brennan. Lizzie is currently an ARC Discovery

Indigenous Fellow and a lead researcher in a Western Desert language survival project auspiced by the Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language.

There were many other inspiring interpreters who worked with the AIS in those early days, but I'll mention just two. One is Margaret Kemarre Turner, author of *Iwenhe Tyerrtye – What it means to be an Aboriginal person*, an extended and poetic philosophical essay in Arrernte and English. MK, as she is familiarly known, was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, “for service to the Aboriginal community of Central Australia, particularly through preserving language and culture, and interpreting”. The other is the Hon. Bess Nungarrayi Price, who in 2016, when she was a serving Northern Territory Government Minister, challenged the ruling of the Speaker of the House that it had been “disorderly” of Bess to address the Legislative Assembly in her first language, Warlpiri, without the leave of the Speaker. Minister Price submitted that, as a Member of an electorate in which the majority of constituents speak a traditional language as their first language, she should be permitted to speak in Warlpiri in the Assembly as she saw fit, “with an appropriate English interpretation following”.⁵ They say that a week is a long time in politics, but it took twenty years for our Legislative Assembly to progress from Denis Burke’s wheelchair to the rocket Bess Price fired at the Speaker of the Assembly.

The outstanding and varied accomplishments of Veronica, Lizzie, Christobel, MK and Bess show just how powerful, provocative and prescient was “Get the Message!”, the first slogan of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. The AIS was a stone chucked in the pond of monolingual complacency. Its ripples have spread far and wide, and to unexpected places in unexpected ways. In establishing the Interpreter Service, IAD, an Aboriginal controlled, community based organisation, was sending a message: these are our languages, we are proud of them, and we will not let them die.

In the Top End, however, although the School of Australian Languages – SAL – at Batchelor had begun training interpreters at around the same time as IAD in the Centre, no Aboriginal interpreter service had ever been set up, and there was no NGO in Darwin like IAD to take up the task. Back then, ARDS Aboriginal Corporation, which in recent years has produced a wonderful collection of resources for Aboriginal interpreter services, was not actively engaged in language work. The NT Government had started an ethnic interpreter and translator service in the early 1980s, but it did not have the capacity or the specialised resources required to meet the needs of speakers of Indigenous languages.

However, there were some keen and capable officers in the Northern Territory Department of the Office of Aboriginal Development who strongly supported the idea of a Territory-wide Aboriginal interpreter service, and in 1996 they not only produced the “Action Plan” I mentioned earlier, but they put it into action. A dynamic and outspoken Indigenous co-ordinator, Colleen Rosas, who interestingly, had previously worked at IAD, where she had got to know its interpreters, was appointed. A register of Aboriginal interpreters was compiled. Batchelor College ran an intensive program

⁵ Hon, Bess Nungarrayi Price MLA, letter to Hon. Kezia Purck MLA, 12 February 2016

of training workshops and NAATI tests. The ground having been prepared, in 1997 a six month evaluated trial Top End interpreter service was conducted.

The Commonwealth had by now got on board too. In his message to the well attended 1995 Alice Springs *Proper True Talk* forum (something of a precursor to our *Language and the Law* conferences) jointly convened by NAATI and his Department, Federal Attorney-General Michael Lavarch, citing his government's adoption of the deaths in custody Royal Commission recommendations, said "The courts and tribunals in the legal system will only become truly fair and accessible to Indigenous Australians when trained interpreters are readily available." The Commonwealth chucked in the funds required to pay the fees of the interpreters used in the Top End trial. This was an important contribution: in my view the trial would likely have failed if it had been set up, like the struggling IAD program, on a fee-for-service basis.

Instead, the trial was a success. According to its draft evaluation report, the data showed that during the trial interpreters had been widely used, that an Aboriginal interpreter service was needed, and that to set it up would be both feasible and cost effective. Indeed, the draft report found that "the cost to Government of not providing and accessing interpreters in Aboriginal languages far exceeds the cost of providing them."

However, when, after several months delay, the Northern Territory Attorney-General's Department published the final evaluation report in May 1998, it told a radically different story. It did not find that during the trial interpreters had been widely used. It did not find that an Aboriginal interpreter service was needed. It did not find that it would be feasible. And it did not find that it would be cost effective.

In 1981 the Northern Territory Government had nobbled one plan to set up an Aboriginal interpreter service. In 1998 they did it again, in exactly the same way.

But unlike 1981, when there was barely a murmur of dissent about what was then a barely recognised issue, in 1998 there was a concerted and angry response. Stakeholders and supporters set up an Aboriginal Interpreter Service Working Group to run a campaign. Its members made representations to the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Dawn Lawrie, which persuaded her to conduct an own initiative inquiry into the matter, commencing in February 1999. Over 100 people made submissions to Commissioner Lawrie, and her report delivered on 29 July 1999 to Attorney-General Denis Burke pulled no punches, and included full details of his Department's disgraceful 1998 nobble.

Chief Minister and Attorney-General Burke's response was prompt, forthright and dismissive: he delivered his wheelchair speech. A petition bearing 5,000 signatures calling for the immediate introduction of an Aboriginal interpreter service was presented to the Legislative Assembly, but with conservative governments now entrenched in both Darwin and Canberra, it looked like there was still a long long way to go before a properly resourced Territory-wide Aboriginal interpreter service would be established.

But then, just a few months later, a 15 year old Groote Eylandt lad was sentenced to a mandatory 28 day sentence of detention for stealing less than \$50 of writing

materials from his local council offices. Unassisted by an interpreter, he apparently did not understand why he had been sent to Don Dale. On 9 February 2000, he hanged himself in his cell.

Wurramarrba's tragic death thrust an ongoing Senate Committee inquiry into the Northern Territory's controversial mandatory juvenile sentencing laws onto the national stage, and when the Committee report was delivered just a few weeks later, it recommended Commonwealth intervention to overturn the Territory's mandatory sentencing laws for children. It also recommended the introduction of an Aboriginal interpreter service as a high priority. John Howard's government did not want to open a can of worms by meddling in Northern Territory business, but several Coalition MPs were threatening to cross the floor on the issue. So Howard did what he was so good at doing: he made a deal. On 10 April 2000, he and Denis Burke issued a joint statement in which various measures were taken to mitigate the effects of the Territory's mandatory sentencing for juveniles. And right at the end, as a final sweetener, came this: "The Prime Minister also agreed that the Commonwealth would jointly fund an Aboriginal interpreter service."

Under this agreement, over \$1,000,000 was allocated to establish the service and to fund agencies to purchase its services.⁶ By year's end the AIS had 118 registered interpreters in over 70 Aboriginal languages, led by the redoubtable Colleen Rosas, who remained at the helm until 2018.

And what about the IAD service, which for 17 years had been patiently plugging away on its shoestring budget? Now it was not only no longer the only show in town, but it was very much the poor cousin. Understandably, government departments preferred to use the government service provider, and after a period in which both interpreter services continued to operate in Alice Springs, the IAD service finally quietly closed its doors. There was no fanfare, but those of us who had been there at the start were comforted by the fact that at long last, after twenty years of struggle, the powers that be had at last got the message.

Russell Goldflam

6 April 2019

⁶ Office of the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, *Draft Guidelines on the Provision of Aboriginal Interpreter Services*, November 2000