

27 November 2014

Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: senator.fierravanti-wells@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Re: Translating and Interpreting Sector Roundtable Discussion

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) is Queensland's leading force for social change, working to eliminate poverty and disadvantage. With more than 600 members, QCOSS undertakes informed advocacy and supports a strong community sector.

QCOSS's key activities focus on providing effective policy advice, work to strengthen responsive community services and having productive partnerships with government, private sector, the media and the sector. This work is done with a Queensland free of poverty and disadvantage front of mind.

QCOSS is also funded to develop policies and programs and undertake advocacy to improve culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities' access to programs and services and their participation in wider community life. To this end, QCOSS convenes the Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group (QAIWG), a cooperative of non-Government organisations as well as NAATI in an advisory role to the Working Group.

I would like to congratulate you on your initiative to host the Translating and Interpreting Sector Roundtable and thank you for the invitation to attend. Unfortunately, QCOSS and the QAIWG will not be able to participate at the roundtable meeting on 28 November 2014 but are pleased to respond to your invitation to provide this written submission.

On 15 September 2014, the QAIWG hosted a language services roundtable in Brisbane of key industry representatives. While the focus of the Queensland roundtable meeting was state-specific, several issues are also important to note from a national perspective including:

- a stronger education campaign is needed to emphasise the value of using credentialed interpreters and translators across all sectors and the dangers of reliance on families and friends as interpreters
- a stronger statement of commitment should be made by Governments to ensuring interpreters and translators are afforded fair conditions of work and professional conditions of contract
- the need to maintain a commitment to the requirements for credentialing interpreters and translators under the existing NAATI policies.

In relation to the latter point, it is concerning that there appears to be some movement in parts of Australia towards engaging as interpreters persons with tertiary qualifications in languages other than English or tertiary qualifications in interpreting, believing them to be “credentialed” interpreters and translators by merit of that tertiary qualification. However, if those persons have not sat for the NAATI test and they have not sought credentialing through NAATI, they are not credentialed interpreters. Only in languages for which a NAATI test is not available would other qualifications and skills, together with proficiency in English be considered for a NAATI recognition credential.

I would also like to take this opportunity to call for more support from the Australian Government for the establishment and development of community Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language services. This is of particular importance to ensure equitable access to social, educational and health services and representation in the civic and judicial systems for Indigenous persons in Far North Queensland, Cape York and the Torres Strait. It is suggested that further funding of NAATI to facilitate courses in community languages for these remote areas of Queensland requires prioritization.

Also in relation to the provision of language services to rural and remote regions, there is value in further exploring the application of Video Remote Interpreting.

I note that there also appears to be increasing demand for locally provided courses to support migrants and refugees in provincial regions of Queensland to become NAATI credentialed interpreters. A key issue for migrant and refugee communities in regional areas of this state is the onerous cost of completing interpreter training and the cost of travel to participate in these courses and to sit for the NAATI tests. This cost factor may preclude entry by migrants to embarking on career pathways in this language services industry.

There is also a need to see Government investment into research which explores the value of working with credentialed interpreters in different settings from health and mental health to law and domestic violence.

The impetus of your proactive steps to promote Translating and Interpreting Services in Australia serves also to advance the implementation of other important Government commitments and plans.

One such plan that will be advanced by the increased emphasis on the use of credentialed interpreters is the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children to 2022*. This National Plan promotes as a fundamental principle that everyone has a right to access and to participate in justice processes that enable them to achieve fair and just outcomes. Strategies included in the National Plan recognise the need to address barriers such as low English language proficiency of refugee and immigrant women. The National Plan also advocates for mainstream services to improve their cultural competence. The use of credentialed interpreters when working with women and children experiencing violence is essential to achieving fair and just outcomes for Aboriginal and non-English-speaking women.

An earlier publication of the Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group, *Still a Matter of Interpretation* <https://www.qcross.org.au/still-matter-interpretation-report-0> , may be useful to the objectives of your roundtable meeting to identify gaps in the languages services sector and areas requiring improvements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. I look forward to the outcomes from the roundtable meetings in Canberra. Your office can contact Grazia Catalano, Multicultural Policy Officer, QCOSS, on email graziac@qcross.org.au for any further assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Mark Henley
Chief Executive Officer