

GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations
Report on the Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner

GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Report
3-16(2) on the
Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner



COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT conduct a review of its website policies and report back on whether the website policy is in compliance with official languages policies, guidelines and legislation.

GNWT response:

Responsibility for communications management and the provision of information to the public is largely delegated to Ministers and individual departments under *Communications Policy #11.21*. Individual departments are generally responsible for planning and conducting communications activities in support of the development, management and delivery of departmental programs and services. Departments are responsible for complying with relevant legislation and policies in carrying out their communications activities, including the *Official Languages Act*, *Official Languages Policy #71.10* and *Communications Policy #11.21*.

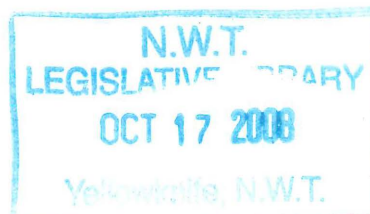
Communications Policy #11.21 sets out the general framework and principles for GNWT communications. The Policy affirms that the status of languages under the *Official Languages Act* should be respected and upheld in all government communications. However, the Policy does not establish specific requirements on communications in the official languages of the Northwest Territories.

The *Official Languages Policy #71.10* provides that members of the public may have reasonable access to GNWT programs and services in the official languages. The Policy also provides that the Executive Council may approve Official Languages Guidelines establishing specific responsibilities with respect to the use of official languages in the delivery of government programs and services.

The Executive Council approved *Official Languages Guidelines* applicable to all GNWT departments and specified boards and agencies in 1997. Guideline #6 establishes specific requirements for the translation of public information material used in the delivery of programs and services or in public consultation. Under the Guideline, public information material shall be translated into the official languages when:

- The material has been requested on an on-going and frequent basis by members of the public speaking an official language other than English; or
- The substance of the material is of significant importance to the health or safety of members of the public.

The Guideline also requires that non-translated public information material include a statement indicating translations can be provided upon reasonable request.



Public information material is defined in Guideline #6 as material “*designed to inform or educate the public about various programs and services.*” While the Guideline does not explicitly refer to public information communicated over the Internet, this definition is consistent with the type of information made available to the public on GNWT websites. In general, where departments are publishing print materials in official languages consistent with Guideline #6, these materials are also posted to departmental websites in translation. There have been few, if any, formal requests for the translation of specific web-only materials into other official languages.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT implement and plan training and certification of interpreters and translators and establish a registry of interpreters and translators for all official languages.

GNWT response:

- **Training for Interpreter and Translators**

The Dene Cultural Institute, now known as Yamozha Kue Society, proposed an Aboriginal Interpreter/Translator (I/T) pilot training program. This pilot training is a partnership with the Akaitcho Territory Government to develop and deliver a series of six basic I/T training modules supplemented by a practicum. The focus of the training is to introduce participants to professional applications of interpretation and translation. The purpose of the I/T training is to improve the quality of Aboriginal I/T services and access to such services in NWT communities.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) provided funding to initiate this project and the first Module was completed in March 2007. Elders and participants fluent in the Chipewyan language came from the communities of Deninu Kue, Fort Smith, Lutsel K'e and Dettah/Ndilo.

Upon successful completion of each module, participants receive a Certificate of Completion for that module. Course content was developed in cooperation with the community and can be adapted to community needs. A list of students who completed the training will be published and distributed to community and government services.

- **Certification of Interpreter and Translators**

After the Language Bureau closed in 1997, the Financial Management Board (FMB) directed ECE to develop and implement a certification process for Aboriginal Interpreters/Translators (I/Ts). The certification is to formally recognize the skills required in this occupation under the *Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Act (NWT)*. The Occupational Standards were developed in February 1999 and Certification Process in September 2000. Because these documents are now more than five years old, they required a review prior to being submitted to the Apprenticeship Board for approval.

Representatives of the Aboriginal language communities met twice in 2006 to review and update the occupational standards for Aboriginal I/Ts. The occupational standards were validated and copies circulated to participants for further comments. Another meeting was scheduled to develop an evaluation process and select testing materials to be used in a proposed pilot certification. Unfortunately only one participant responded with the required testing materials and the meeting was postponed.

A review of the whole certification process indicated an apparent lack of qualified Aboriginal evaluators among some Aboriginal language communities. Elders can verify the speaking proficiency of a candidate in an interpretation setting. However, there is a lack of qualified evaluators to verify the writing skills of a candidate. The project was put on hold with cancellation of the certification contract by mutual agreement of all parties.

The intention now is to complete the certification process in the future when there are qualified Aboriginal I/Ts who have completed an I/T training program and can actively participate in and contribute to the Aboriginal I/T certification process.

- Registry of Interpreters and Translators

Since the closure of the Language Bureau, ECE has maintained a listing of available Aboriginal Interpreter/Translators, which is updated on an annual basis. This list is made available to other departments, boards and agencies upon request. The Department is not in a position to fully assess the level of skills of individual Interpreter/Translator, but staff can provide advice based on comments received with respect to services provided by the Interpreters/Translators.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT respond to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight “Report on the Review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner” by addressing all recommendations from the Commissioner and the Committee in its reply to the present report.

GNWT response:

The GNWT response to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight “Report on the review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner” is provided as an attachment.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

GNWT response:

**GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations
Report on the Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner**

The GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Report 3-16(2) on the Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner is hereby presented.

ATTACHMENT

GNWT response to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight's "Report on the review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner"

2005-2006 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories include in its next Bill to amend the *Official Languages Act* changes to clarify the wording of paragraph six of the preamble leading to a more specific prescription for the use of Aboriginal languages provided for in either the Act or regulations;

The Committee further recommends the deletion of paragraph 10, which deals with "language of work", until such time as workplace language, is addressed.

GNWT response:

Any proposed changes to the *Official Languages Act*, be it further clarification to or deletion of wording, would require an amendment to the Act. The Standing Committee on Government Operations is reviewing the Act in 2008 and is scheduled to have a final report, including possible recommendations, in spring 2009.

2005-2006 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends the GNWT examine and report back on the implications and advisability of extending obligations of the *Official Languages Act* to third parties that provide direct government services on a contractual basis.

Furthermore, the Committee recommends the GNWT review and report back on the legal implications and the feasibility of abandoning the concepts of "significant demand" and "nature of the office" in favour of regulations specifying "basic services that should be available in any and all Official Languages regardless of the geographic area".

GNWT response:

As per the GNWT response to the 2005-2006 Committee recommendation above, any proposed changes to the *Official Languages Act*, be it further clarification to or deletion of wording, would require an amendment to the Act. As a result, it is best to consider as part of the next scheduled review of the Act.

2005-2006 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends the GNWT review and report back on their system for providing service through toll-free numbers in French and Aboriginal Languages.

GNWT response:

In March 2003, as part of its final report, *One Land Many Voices*, the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act* recommended that the GNWT work with the federal government and the francophone community to support the establishment of a pilot French language Single-Window Service Centre in Yellowknife. This "one-stop shop" aims to bring together government services, or information about them, to members of the public. Services are also made available to the public in outlying communities through a 1-800 toll-free line.

In response to this recommendation, the GNWT indicated its commitment to action in *The GNWT Response to the NWT Official Languages Report (2003)* and conducted an analysis of services to offer and associated financial requirements to determine the benefits of operating such a service centre. In December 2003, the GNWT contracted the services of Conroy Ross Partners Limited to conduct a study regarding the delivery of government services in English and French using a single-window model.

Research into the feasibility of a single-window model of government service delivery concluded that the initiative had strong support from GNWT departments, agencies and the NWT French community.

The GNWT is prepared to consult with Aboriginal languages communities to determine which service needs could be met through a single window approach.

2005-2006 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends that the GNWT implement a plan for the training and certification of interpreters and translators.

GNWT response:

- Training of Interpreter and Translators:

Years ago, training for Aboriginal Interpreters/Translators (I/Ts) was provided by the GNWT Department of Culture and Communications. However, since the closure of the Language Bureau in 1997, this service no longer exists.

In its response to the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act*, ECE recognised that I/T training remains necessary and indicated that the Minister responsible was committed to working with the language communities to determine how best to accomplish this.

In 2005, the Yamozha Kue Society (formerly known as the Dene Cultural Institute) proposed a pilot training program in the Akaitcho Territory region to develop and deliver a series of basic interpretation and translation training modules. Training is to be offered to community residents who have an interest in becoming interpreter/translators and are fluent in their Dene language. The training will give participants the opportunity to develop their language skills through practice, while acting as interpreter/translators. The proposed pilot training is based on the Language Bureau's I/T training modules. Each module is one week long and builds on the previous module. The pilot training program would provide a first step toward increasing overall access to, and quality of, Dene interpretation and translation services in NWT communities.

The Department will give serious consideration to funding this proposed pilot program, in line with the availability of necessary resources.

- Certification of Interpreters and Translators:

In 1997, after the privatization of Aboriginal languages services, the FMB directed ECE to develop and implement a certification process that formally recognizes the skills required in the languages services industry.

ECE, along with interpreters, translators and members of other organizations developed and finalized the "Occupational Standards" in February 1999. The Standards identify the knowledge, skills and aptitudes required to be considered competent in the occupation of Aboriginal language Interpreter/translator (I/T). A "Certification Process" was finalized in September 2000 outlining the process by which the competency of an Aboriginal I/T is examined and a certificate of competency issued to the successful applicant. The certification process was developed in consultation with the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council.

Because NWT interpreters and translators are not formally organized, ECE offered to perform the administrative duties attached to the certification process. It was agreed that in order to have a broader acceptance of the process, the language standards and testing materials had to be developed by the language communities. ECE made funding available to Aboriginal language communities for the purpose of developing these language standards and testing materials.

The Chipewyan language community is the only community that entered into the process of developing language standards and testing materials, and Chipewyan language standards were completed. After testing materials are developed, it is intended that the Chipewyan model be offered to other language communities as a guide.

Further consultation with administrators of the *Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Act* indicated that, because the documents were developed some time ago,

materials developed for the Occupational Standards and Certification Process must be reviewed before they are formally submitted for approval to the Apprenticeship Board.

2005-2006 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends that the GNWT, after progress has been made with the establishment of interpreter/translator training and certification program proceed with establishing a registry of interpreters and translators for all official languages.

GNWT response:

Since privatizing its Aboriginal languages services in 1997, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has maintained a listing of available Aboriginal Interpreter/Translators, which is updated on an annual basis. This list is made available to other departments, boards and agencies upon request.

2005-2006 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends the GNWT table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

GNWT response:

As indicated by the GNWT Response to the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner, the Government is committed to responding to Standing Committee reports in a timely manner.