



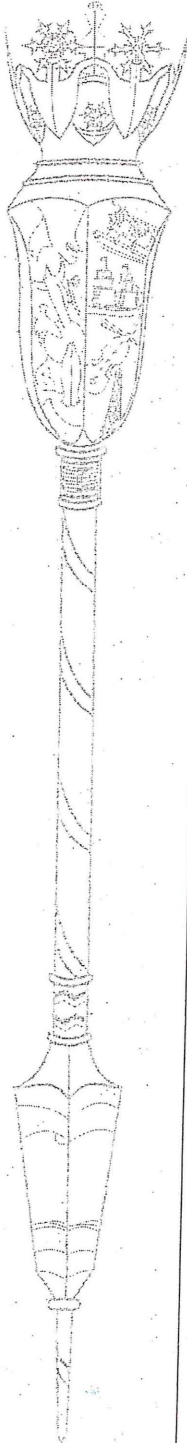
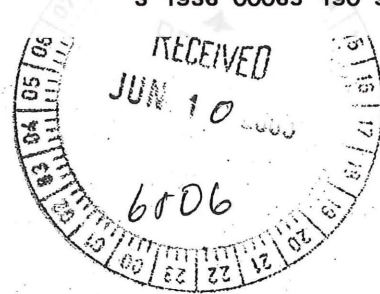
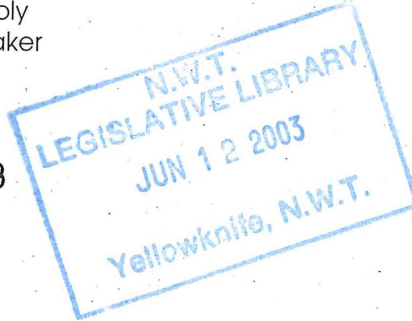
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JUN 10 2003



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Commentary by the Languages Commissioner

You will find attached a self-explanatory letter and attachment from the Premier. As a Statutory Officer of the Legislative Assembly, the Languages Commissioner reports to the Legislative Assembly and takes direction from the Assembly through the provisions of the Official Languages Act.

I would agree with the Premier and appreciate him forwarding it to my attention so that we can follow protocol for statutory officers. This is past on to you for your information as I have no official mechanism to do otherwise.

Anthony (Tony) Whitford
Speaker

Attachment

c. Languages Commissioner



THE PREMIER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

JUN 04 2003

HONOURABLE TONY WHITFORD
SPEAKER

**Official Languages Commissioner's Comments SCOL Report and OLA
Amendments**

In preparation for Cabinet's consideration of the report of the Special Committee on Official Languages (SCOL), I asked the Official Languages Commissioner for her comments on the report and proposed amendments to the *Official Languages Act* (OLA).

It has been brought to my attention that because the Official Languages Commissioner is an officer of the House, I should have advised you of my request and asked that her comments be communicated through your Office.

I apologize to you and Members for this oversight on my part. The Commissioner's comments are attached.

Stephen Kakfwi

Attached

c: Ministers
Official Languages Commissioner



The Honourable Stephen Kakfwi
 Premier
 Government of the NWT
 NWT Legislative Assembly
 2nd Floor, Executive,
 Box 1320
 Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

June 2, 2003

Premier KAKFWI	JUN 3 2003
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Amendments to the Official Languages Act





As Languages Commissioner of the NWT, I would like to take this opportunity to address the timing of the proposed amendments to the Official Languages Act (OLA). Although we have been asked by the communities to respond to the Special Committee on Official Languages (SCOL) report, the OLC has decided to direct its comments to the Government before releasing a report to the public.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has a justly deserved international reputation as a leader in preserving and upholding Aboriginal languages. The OLA is a reflection of the Government's and the NWT Legislative Assembly's commitment to this important goal. Although the OLA has not been fully implemented to the degree that it should, the current government has accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time. There is no reason to question that the goal of language preservation and promotion can be reached.



However, to be successful, it is essential that the Government not be rushed into amending the OLA before it has taken the time necessary:

- a) to carefully consider the report and the recommendations from SCOL and appropriate recommendations from other sources,
- b) to develop a well thought out strategy and implementation plan for meeting the challenges of preserving and enhancing our Official Languages, and only then,
- c) to prepare a set of amendments to the OLA to best support and complement the strategy and plan.



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The OLA called for an official review of the Act after ten years. The Special Committee on Official Languages tabled its report in the Legislative Assembly in March 2003. The report includes a number of recommendations for changes to the Act as well as numerous recommendations regarding improvements in the way Official Languages are preserved and enhanced. This is an enormous and daunting task. While there is an understandable desire on the part of the Committee to want to amend the Act during the life of this Assembly, I would urge the Government to resist that temptation and take the time required to consider fully the implications of these recommendations.



The SCOL report is a very good start and the Committee members and their staff are to be commended. However, the GNWT should approach Official Languages the way it approaches other important priorities. It should complete its research and analysis, develop a thorough and sophisticated plan and only then decide what amendments to the OLA would best complement and serve the interests of that plan.



The OLC has been looking closely at the SCOL recommendations, as well as its own recommendations and the recommendations of its Advisory Board. We have discovered ourselves how difficult it is to formulate a plan to most effectively implement those recommendations. For example, a major concern is with SCOL's recommendation to establish a proposed new Secretariat with a Minister Responsible for Official Languages. The recommendation itself is too ambiguous and vague.



One of the main recommendations from the OLC's paper, 'Keeping Our Minds Strong,' is that, *"A Cultural and Language Secretariat should be established with the lead responsibility for Language Revitalization planning, coordination and program/service delivery. Such an institution could be established by culling program and service resources from other departments where Language Revitalization programs and services are lost within the main focus of the department."* This would include, for example, the transfer of vote 1 and vote 4 monies from Education Culture and Employment to the new Secretariat. This is only one issue that needs to be fleshed out in a comprehensive implementation plan.

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In my view it is not possible for the GNWT to complete a comprehensive plan for languages including amendments to OLA during the life of this Legislature. I strongly urge the Government to direct its officials to immediately begin the task of developing such a plan and leave it to the next government to introduce amendments to the OLA.

We have been given a promise from the lawgivers to the people that Aboriginal Languages will survive forever as vibrant living languages. It is my sincere hope that we strengthen the Act, so we can live up to that promise and leave a legacy of languages to future generations.

Mahsi,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fibbie Tatti".

Fibbie Tatti
NWT Languages Commissioner

c. Honourable Jake Ootes

