



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee  
Report 4-20(1): Report on the Review of the 2022-2023 Annual Report  
of the Northwest Territories Languages Commissioner**

Background

The Standing Committee on Government Operations released the *Report on the Review of the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Languages Commissioner* (the Report) on June 06, 2024.

The report provides five (5) specific recommendations for the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) departments and agencies. Responses to the recommendations of SCOGO are outlined as follows.

Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment ensure all official languages communities are actively represented on the Official Languages Board

*GNWT Response*

The Official Languages Board is currently active and represented by all official languages except for English.

The Report notes in the Endnotes that "Information on board membership is available at: <https://boardappointments.exec.gov.nt.ca/en/appointments/appointments-full/>." This website is managed by the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs (EIA). EIA has notified the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) that the website has irreparable coding issues that make updating the Official Languages Board membership information impossible. To bypass this issue, ECE has created a website that can be managed by ECE Communications team that can be referenced for current membership: <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/official-languages>. To resolve this issue, the EIA webpage is currently being redirected to the information on the ECE website.

Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT provide Committee with a list of:

1. All Indigenous language speakers that work for the government.
2. Whether those employees receive the Bilingual Bonus for providing service in their Indigenous language.
3. What government services are being offered in an Indigenous language (and in which communities).

#### *GNWT Response to 1-2*

There are two ways that the Department of Finance tracks official languages speakers. First, the GNWT's HR management system provides an opportunity for GNWT employees to self-identify as a speaker of any of the 10 additional official languages of the Northwest Territories alongside English. Second, employees may be eligible to receive a bilingual bonus for an additional official language through the Bilingual Bonus Policy.

Individuals do not have to self-assess in the HR management system to receive the Bilingual Bonus. Due to privacy reasons, the GNWT cannot share the names of the individuals who self-assess as speaking an Indigenous language or receive a Bilingual Bonus for Indigenous languages. However, each year, ECE compiles data on Bilingual Bonus recipients for the *Annual Report on Official Languages*. The most recent data reports that 154 GNWT employees are receiving the Bilingual Bonus for Indigenous languages. APPENDIX A illustrates the number of people in each department receiving a bilingual bonus for each official Indigenous language.

It is also important to note that language bonuses are integrated into the salary of jobs that require knowledge of an additional language, and those positions would not be reflected in the Bilingual Bonus data.

#### *GNWT Response to 3*

Government institutions listed under Schedule 1 of the *Government Institution Regulations* are all required to deliver services in Indigenous languages in accordance with the *Official Languages Act*. Some areas of the public services, including the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services' Indigenous Wellness program and EIA's Single Window Services Centres have established units to operationalize Indigenous language services requests. Offices that do not have similar units dedicated to Indigenous language service delivery, are expected to follow the process set out in the forthcoming *Indigenous Languages Services Standards* to ensure that all GNWT services are offered in Indigenous languages. The Standards apply to all services offered by the GNWT in accordance with the *Official Languages Act*.

Single Window Service Centres with fluent Indigenous language speakers include:

- Wekweètì
- Whatì

- Gamètì
- Behchokò
- Colville lake
- Délı̨ne
- Fort Good Hope
- Ulukhaktok

Every effort is made to ensure there is understanding and access for elders and those who prefer to speak in their Indigenous languages to access services.

### Recommendation 3

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT develop an assessment program for the nine Official Indigenous Languages.

#### *GNWT Response*

During the drafting of the Indigenous Languages Services Standards, the Department of Finance and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment have discussed assessment options for GNWT employees receiving a Bilingual Bonus for Indigenous languages. The Department of Finance is responsible for the assessment of Bilingual Bonus recipients under Finance's Bilingual Bonus Policy.

One option that has been brought to the table is to modify the Indigenous Language Oral Proficiency Assessment tool, which was developed by ECE for use in NWT schools and the Mentor-Apprentice Program, to assess Bilingual Bonus recipients to gauge their proficiency while focusing on the topic of service delivery.

Recognizing the detrimental effects of past government policies on Indigenous languages, it is important that any formal government assessment of Indigenous peoples' ability to speak the language does not highlight language deficiencies. Additionally, the GNWT recognizes the need to offer opportunities to access Indigenous language training for individuals who want to improve their proficiency, similar to what is offered for French language Bilingual Bonus recipients. Therefore, the Department of Finance amended their Indigenous Development Training Program (IDTP) to include Indigenous Languages training as a priority category equivalent to post-secondary courses. The IDTP offers up to \$10,000 per fiscal year and is administrated through the Diversity and Inclusion Unit with the Department of Finance.

### Recommendation 4

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT launch a communications campaign to ensure all employees are aware of the Bilingual Bonus.

### *GNWT Response*

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment and the Department of Finance are planning an internal Bilingual Bonus awareness campaign to align with the release of the Indigenous Languages Services Standards. The Standards lay out the responsibilities of employees receiving a Bilingual Bonus and their role in facilitating Indigenous languages in the delivery of GNWT services. It is imperative that the Standards are final prior to launching the campaign, so the additional roles and responsibilities of employees who receive a Bilingual Bonus are clear, and that there are processes established for, and training available to, bilingual bonus recipients. Procedures to ensure that French speaking employees are aware of the bilingual bonus are already enacted by the Department of Finance and the French language service coordinators committee.

Furthermore, the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework Action Plan item 2.2 outlines that the Department of Finance will celebrate and recognize GNWT employees who use Indigenous languages at work through the bilingual designation employee recognition campaign. Once the Indigenous Languages Services Standards are finalized the Department of Finance and Education, Culture and Employment will commence the recognition campaign.

### Recommendation 5

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT provide the same services and opportunities for Indigenous languages speakers through Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat that are offered to French language speakers through the Francophone Affairs Secretariat.

### *GNWT Response*

To address this, ECE is currently restructuring to create a Language and Culture Branch which aims to better meet the language and culture needs of NWT residents.

The new Language and Culture Branch will raise the profile of all official languages under one Assistant Deputy Minister, while providing tools, advice and support to departments, boards, and agencies for their implementation of the *Official Languages Act*.

The “education” aspect of the Indigenous Languages *and Education* Secretariat has been moved to the Education Branch, which will allow greater focus to be placed on Indigenous language services and language revitalization in the newly named Indigenous Languages Secretariat.

The Indigenous Languages Secretariat is currently responsible for

- Providing advice and support to departments and agencies as they implement the Indigenous Languages Services Standards and Indigenous Languages Communications Guidelines;
- Developing orientation and training necessary to implement the Indigenous Languages Services Standards;
- Coordinating Indigenous language translations services by external privatized translators for all departments and agencies;
- Liaising with the Indigenous languages communities; and,
- Monitoring and evaluating the areas of Indigenous language responsibility, including Indigenous languages services.

It is important to note, however, that official languages services must be in accordance with the *Official Languages Act*. Canada funds 100% of the costs of providing French language services in the NWT. Unfortunately, Canada only funds a proportion of the cost of providing Indigenous language services in the NWT, with the GNWT being required to supplement those costs. The GNWT continues to advocate for an increase in federal support for the provision of Indigenous language services to allow the GNWT to continue to improve the delivery of services in Indigenous languages, in addition to promoting their preservation and revitalization. Francophone Affairs Secretariat works with one language, and responsibility is centered solely around communications and services in four hub communities with significant demand for French, while the Indigenous Languages Secretariat has the dual purpose of language revitalization and services, with 9 official languages in 33 communities to consider. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment continues to use the financial and human resources available to improve access to government services in Indigenous languages.

**APPENDIX A:** The number of people in each department receiving a bilingual bonus for each official Indigenous language.

Government Institution	Dëne Sųłíné (Chipewyan)	Dene Kədá (North Slavey)	Dene Zhatié (South Slavey)	Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik (Gwich'in)	nēhiyawēwin (Cree)	Inuinnaqtun	Inuktitut	Inuvialuktun	Tłı̄chq	Grand Total
Education & Cult Employment		1	2						6	9
Environment & Climate Change		1	1							2
Executive and Indigenous Affairs	1	2							4	7
Finance		2							1	3
Industry, Tourism & Investment		3	1						1	5
Infrastructure			1						2	3
Justice			1						1	2
Legislative Assembly		1								1
Municipal & Community Affairs		1							1	2

<b>Beaufort Delta DEC</b>						1				<b>1</b>
<b>Dehcho DEC</b>			5							<b>5</b>
<b>Sahtu DEC</b>		5								<b>5</b>
<b>South Slave DEC</b>			1							<b>1</b>
<b>Tłıchq CSA - Education</b>									25	<b>25</b>
<b>Tłıchq CSA - HSS</b>									41	<b>41</b>
<b>NTHSSA</b>	2	18	9		1	3	1		8	<b>42</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>154</b>