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Review Panel  
Multicultural Framework Review

Dear Review Panel

**RE: Multicultural Framework Review  
Submission - Gasra na Gaeilge**

Gasra na Gaeilge is a volunteer community run organisation that aims to be the centre for the Irish language in South Australia (see [here](#)).

We promote using the Irish Language and support learners and speakers through Irish language classes and a range of Irish language events, including the very popular Pop-up Gaeltachts (or Irish speaking areas) which temporarily transform a cafe, pub or bar into an Irish speaking space.

We are one of a number of community run Irish language organisations across Australia with others, eg, in New South Wales (Scoil na Gaeilge Sydney, see [here](#); Australian School of Celtic Learning, see [here](#)), Victoria (Cumann Gaeilge na hAstráile, see [here](#); Gaelscoil Melbourne see [here](#)), and Australian Capital Territory (Canberra Irish Language Association, see [here](#)). In preparation of this submission we have consulted with each of these organisations and all have endorsed this submission.

Year on year, we receive more and more queries from Irish living in Australia and Australians with Irish heritage about attending our classes and events. However, this has been met with limited to no support from successive Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

The Irish language supports Australians to experience unbroken cultural continuity and resilience. This builds empathy and understanding with all minority communities living together in Australia.

We welcome this review and encourage the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to better prioritise, support and fund the use and learning of not just the Irish language but all languages spoken in Australia today.

### **Irish in Australia**

Since European occupation, a significant number of Irish have migrated to Australia, becoming the third most commonly identified heritage in Australia behind Australian and English. In the 2021 Australian census almost 2.5 million or 10% of the Australian population identified as

having Irish ancestry and migration of Irish to Australia continues to this day, with 80,927 Irish born people living in Australia as of the 2021 Australian census.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Irish language in Australia**

Gaeilge or the Irish language (also referred to as Irish Gaelic) is believed to be the oldest written vernacular language north of the Alps,<sup>2</sup> and is the first official language of Ireland<sup>3</sup> and is spoken by almost 1.9 million people in Ireland today,<sup>4</sup> and is one of the official languages in the *European Union*.

Historically Irish migrants to Australia brought with them and continue to bring with them the Irish language and it is believed that Irish was the second most commonly-spoken language in Victoria in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Today 1875 people in Australia identify as speaking Irish at home (see 2021 census) of which 59 are in South Australia.<sup>6</sup>

## **Irish Language education in Australia**

Irish Language education is a key part of our work and the work of other Irish Language organisations in Australia. Over the years, we have run weekly classes, but in recent times have been unable to continue these due to a lack of resources, particularly Irish language teachers.

Before Covid, the language schools came together for weekend long and volunteer run immersion schools or *Daoinscoileanna* which were held every six months in different Australian cities.

Significant efforts have also been undertaken in Melbourne to establish Australia's first all Irish language school or *Gaelscoil Melbourne* (see [here](#)), which mirrors similar efforts in Ireland to promote Irish language used in learning through Irish medium education.

Notwithstanding the above efforts, more government funding and supports could be made available to community schools in order to support language instruction and events rather than leaving the work to dedicated but all the same unpaid volunteers.

## **Irish language names in Australia**

Irish Language names, commonly have the síneadh fada, or acute accent in them, for example, the “é” in Séamus. However, at present across a number jurisdictions in Australia, diacritics such as the síneadh fada are restricted in registration of names

This means Irish language names are commonly considered prohibited names and not registered on birth certificates, passports and other government documents, such as Medicare and Centrelink documents.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and housing: Cultural diversity data summary, table 4.

<sup>2</sup> Údarás na Gaeltachta. (1980 - 2015). Stair na Gaeilge. <http://www.udaras.ie/an-ghaeilge-an-ghaeltacht/stair-na-gaeilge/>.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Ireland, Article 8.

<sup>4</sup> An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh, 'Census of Population 2022 - Summary Results' (see [here](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Noone, V. (2012). Hidden Ireland in Victoria. Ballarat, an Astráil: Ballarat Heritage Services, p 12.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and housing: Cultural diversity data summary, table 5.

This significantly impairs almost 10% of Australians who identify as having Irish heritage from expressing and connecting with that heritage through one of the most important means of cultural and linguistic expression, names.

Diacritics are regularly used in passports, including Irish passports, with the International Civil Aviation Organisation's or ICAO Doc 9303 on Machine Readable Travel Documents (see [here](#)) providing a comprehensive standard for the transliteration of multinational characters to English, including letters with the síneadh fada. Notwithstanding the internationally accepted ICAO standard the Australian Passport Office refuses to register Irish language names.<sup>7</sup>

In 2022 Queensland became one of the first jurisdictions in Australia to change their prohibited names policy (see [here](#)) to allow the registration of names with the síneadh fada on, for example, birth certificates. We are also aware that the Northern Territory now also permits use of the síneadh fada.

Today, diacritics can easily be inserted using the keyboard on your phone. However Commonwealth and most State and Territory computer systems lag behind and must be updated to reflect this technological shift and the cultural and linguistic diversity of all citizens.

### **Irish language media in Australia**

Irish language media in Ireland is burgeoning and there has never been more content available in the Irish language than today. Notwithstanding this, there is limited to no programming of Irish language media in Australia, including on Australia's state-funded Special Broadcasting Service or SBS.

SBS's principal function is to "*provide multilingual and multicultural radio, television and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.*"<sup>8</sup>

Over successive years however Irish language programming has been progressively cut along with other languages spoken in Australia from across the globe which severely impacts native speakers' ability to engage with their heritage languages.

The Commonwealth government and SBS must increase programming hours for Irish and other languages spoken in Australia, so they fully reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia today.

### **Next steps**

As part of this review we request that recommendations be made to support increased funding and support for languages from all across the world that are spoken in Australia today. This includes support and funding for education and learning of the Irish language, media programming, as well as recognition and use of diacritics in names across all government bodies and agencies in Australia.

Gasra na Gaeilge

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<sup>7</sup> See Tom Flanagan, "The passport omission enraging thousands across Australia: 'A joke'" (Yahoo!News) (19 Jan 2022) [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*, s 6(1).