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# Issues in language revitalisation

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# Outline

- What is language revitalisation?
  - Relations between documentation and revitalisation
  - Two case studies
  - Conclusions
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# Language revitalisation

- efforts to increase **language vitality** by taking action to:
    - increase the domains of use of a language and/or
    - Increase the number of speakers (often in the context of reversing language shift)
  - older than language documentation (serious work began in 1970s and 1980s among Maori, Native American groups and others)
  - Speech/language community members are often more interested in revitalisation than documentation
  - Often assumed revitalisation = formal language learning (school lessons, immersion)
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# Examples

- Amery, Rob 1998 WARRABARNA KAURNA: Reclaiming Aboriginal Languages from Written Historical Sources: A Kurna Case Study. PhD Thesis, Linguistics, University of Adelaide.
- Hinton and Hale 2001 'The green book of language revitalisation'
- Hinton 2002 'How to keep your language alive'
- Hinton 2013 'Bringing our languages home: revitalisation for families'



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# Issues in language revitalisation

- Revitalisation is bound up with politics, attitudes and ideologies
    - of speakers, activists, linguists ...
    - often poorly understood
  - ‘New uses’ and ‘new speakers’ may be contested or ideological
  - It has not attracted the same level of funding or recognition as documentation
    - excluded from many grants - seen as ‘unscientific’ praxis
    - often seen as a waste of time by mainstream linguists (‘linguistic social work’ – Newman 2003)
    - also fails to engage applied linguists (Cope 2012)
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# Issues in language revitalisation

- Under-theorised
  - Aims are often not articulated, activities are not evaluated
  - Poorly meta-documented – lack of good ethnographies of language revitalisation

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# Revitalisation and documentation – not a simple relationship

- ❑ ‘Revitalisation’ has been seen by some documentary linguists as a simple technical add-on
  - = orthography, dictionaries, videos, primers, multimedia
- ❑ But documentary methods and outputs are not always useful for revitalisation

“Work on language documentation to this point has tended to focus on what sorts of records are required to facilitate the creation of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, rather than, for instance, considering what kinds of records are required to adequately document patterns of variation in a community or to provide sufficient context to inform community efforts at language standardization.” (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014)

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# Documentation and revitalisation

- most language documentation outputs are **unsuitable** for revitalisation:
    - inappropriate genres or topics
    - primarily speech of older fluent speakers (reflects linguists' ideology of "saving the language" or "getting the best language") – may be difficult for learners to process
    - no learner-directed speech (cf. Slow Italian website)
  - Observed language practices may not match perceived/stated ones
  - Some speakers/language activists may prefer 'folk linguistics' or purism to documentary evidence
    - Documentation which demonstrates low vitality, attrition, 'decline', variation and change may be unwelcome
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# and

- 'Elders' may traditionally be seen as language authorities
    - May not be willing to lose this role to linguists or activists
  - Activists may not want to wait for description and analysis
    - Sense of urgency; enthusiasm rather than planning
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# Documentation **for** revitalisation

- what would language documentation look like if it was done with a goal of producing outputs for revitalisation?
  - *different genres*: conversation, not just narratives or rituals (Sugita, 2007; Amery, 2009), interactions (greetings, leave takings, ‘phatic communication’)
  - ‘*chunks*’ of language, from fixed/formulaic expressions to whole discourses (eg. ‘Welcome to Country’)
    - Dorian 1980 ‘semi-speaker’ – “a speaker of an endangered language who has a partial linguistic competence” but can sometimes appear ‘more competent’ because they can interact appropriately
    - research suggests proficient language users know a large number of formulaic sequences (e.g. Fillmore, Kay, and O’Connor, 1988; Wray, 2002), with Pawley and Syder (1983) suggesting that speakers know several hundred thousand of these sequences
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# Nathan and Fang 2008

- meta-data for language pedagogy:
  - identification and description of socially/culturally relevant events such as songs, which are of great interest to community members and which provide invaluable teaching materials
  - phenomena that provide learning domains, eg. numbers, kinship, greetings
  - socially important phenomena such as register and code switching
  - notes on learner levels
  - links to associated materials that have explanations and examples
  - notes on previous selections and usages of material for teaching
  - notes on how to use material for teaching
  - notes and warnings about restricted materials or materials which are
  - inappropriate for young or certain groups of people (e.g. profane, archaic etc)
- sociolinguistic survey for education authorities or community bodies to identify potential learner groups and their abilities, needs, and motivations, as well as potential teachers and consultants and their particular skills

# Documentation of revitalisation

- language teaching and associated activities can provide useful language data and insights about structure and use
- Nathan and Fang 2008: language classes provide a unique locus for uncovering language attitudes, paths of acquisition, language change, literacy, language in use, new types of language usage, or identifying new consultants (or roles for people with a range of language skills, eg. Dieri project 'errors' by semi-speakers became materials for language learning games)
- Gómez (2007: 101) argues that a language teaching needs to precede more linguistic documentation in a community for community members to be fully informed and empowered in any participation, and to make their contributions richer

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# Case study 1: Guernsey

Majority language now English

- Indigenous language: “Guernsey [Norman] French”
    - Guernésiais / Dgernesiais / Giernesiei / Djernezié ...
  - ‘Severely’ endangered’ (UNESCO) -> ‘post-vernacular’
  - 200 elderly fluent speakers?
    - out of 63,000 population
  - Only 5 proficient speakers under age 60?
  - Revalorisation, desire for revitalisation
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# Case study 1: Guernsey

Now fairly thoroughly recorded, but not yet fully described / analysed

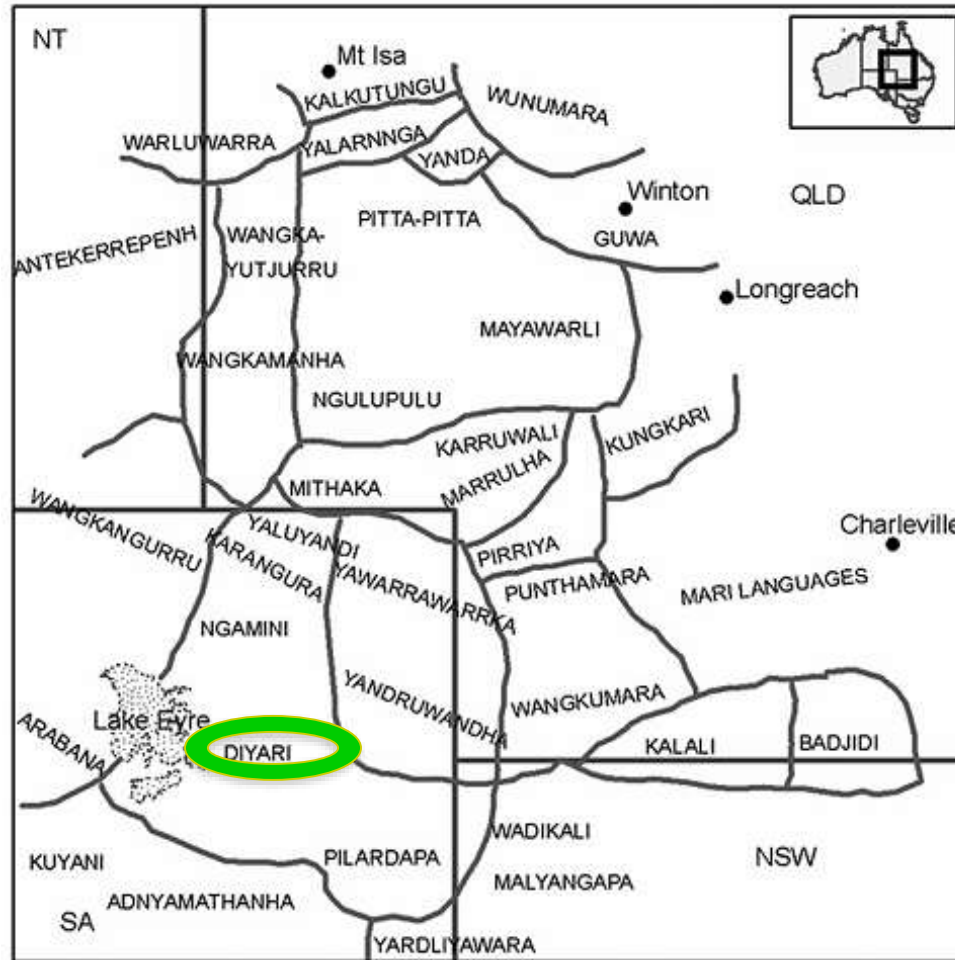
- The few learning materials that exist are not corpus-based
  - Iconic vs. complex variation
    - Regional, gender-related, age-related, social classes/groups
    - Attrition due to lack of interlocutors -> idiolects
  - Language change
    - e.g. reduction in verb paradigms:
      - /mɔʒ/, /mɔʒɑj/ (eat); /di/, /dizɑj/, /diz/ > /di/, /dizɑj/ (say)
    - Over-generalisation, e.g. of plural forms; loss of vowel length differentiation
    - Contact-induced features, calques
    - Not necessarily recognised /accepted by speakers
  - These are all typical of endangered languages
  - Which, if any, should form part of a 'definitive record' of language?
    - and be used in reference/learning/teaching materials?
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# Issues in revitalising Giernesiei

- Lack of proficient adult speakers
    - Very few learners have progressed beyond beginner level
    - Lack of learning opportunities, materials, interlocutors / mentors
  - No standard / consistent spelling
    - Difficult to produce learning materials
  - Differing views/ideologies within community
    - Purism, 'language ownership'
  - Fear of language change
    - 'We don't say it like that'; 'You'll never pronounce it like we do'
    - Unwillingness among 'traditionalists' to adapt / be creative with language
      - 'We speak just like our grandparents'
      - 'We don't have words for modern things'
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# Case study 2: Dieri





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# A bit of history

- In 1974 (yes, that's 40 years ago!) I did the 4<sup>th</sup> (honours) year of my undergraduate studies at ANU in Canberra in Linguistics – as part of this I did fieldwork in northern SA on Diyari, which then had about 12 fluent speakers who had learnt it as a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> language as children (English was their 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> language)
  - I wrote my Honours dissertation on Diyari and then went on 1975-1978 to do my PhD on Diyari
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# Outcomes

- “A Grammar of Diyari, South Australia” 1981
  - Several published articles on morphosyntax, and historical reconstruction
  - Several published texts
  - A study of literacy practices during the missionary period (1860 to 1915), Ben Murray biography
  - Compiled materials for a dictionary (never published)
  - Archived 50 hours of tape-recordings with AIATSIS
  - Active research ended in late 1980s
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# Community developments 1990s-


- Formation of Dieri Aboriginal Corporation – 600 members in Maree, Lyndhurst, Broken Hill, Port Augusta, Whyalla
  - DAC purchases properties, Port Augusta & Broek Hill
  - Purchase of Maree Station and camp ground – handover at dawn 20<sup>th</sup> September 2008
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# Agreement with Santos 2011

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- Corporate Governance
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- Environment
- Public Notifications
- Santos Community Fund
- Community Blog**

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### RECENT POSTS

- Record turnout for Bupa Challenge 2013
- Santos and Starlight make a young man's day at the Santos Tour Down Under
- Santos Mereenie staff provide vital assistance in Kings Canyon bushfire
- Santos Tour Down Under kicks off with glory for Greipel
- Narrabri office up and running

## Santos and Dieri sign milestone cultural heritage agreement


31 Jul 2011

Santos and the Dieri Aboriginal Corporation last week signed a cultural heritage management plan, recognising the significance of traditional owners in the management and protection of cultural heritage in the Dieri native title claim area of the Cooper Basin.


The signing ceremony – which took place at the Art Gallery of South Australia – represented the culmination of formal discussions that began in 2009.

Among the guests at the ceremony were Santos chief executive David Knox, Shane Kemp, Chairperson of the Dieri Aboriginal Corporation, Dieri Elders and the Hon Frances Bedford MP.

The plan brings Santos into best practice for cultural heritage management in its South Australian operations and



To mark the occasion, renowned Dieri artist Mandy Tuipulotu presented David Knox with beautiful painting of a rainbow serpent.



# Native title May 2012 (lodged 1997)



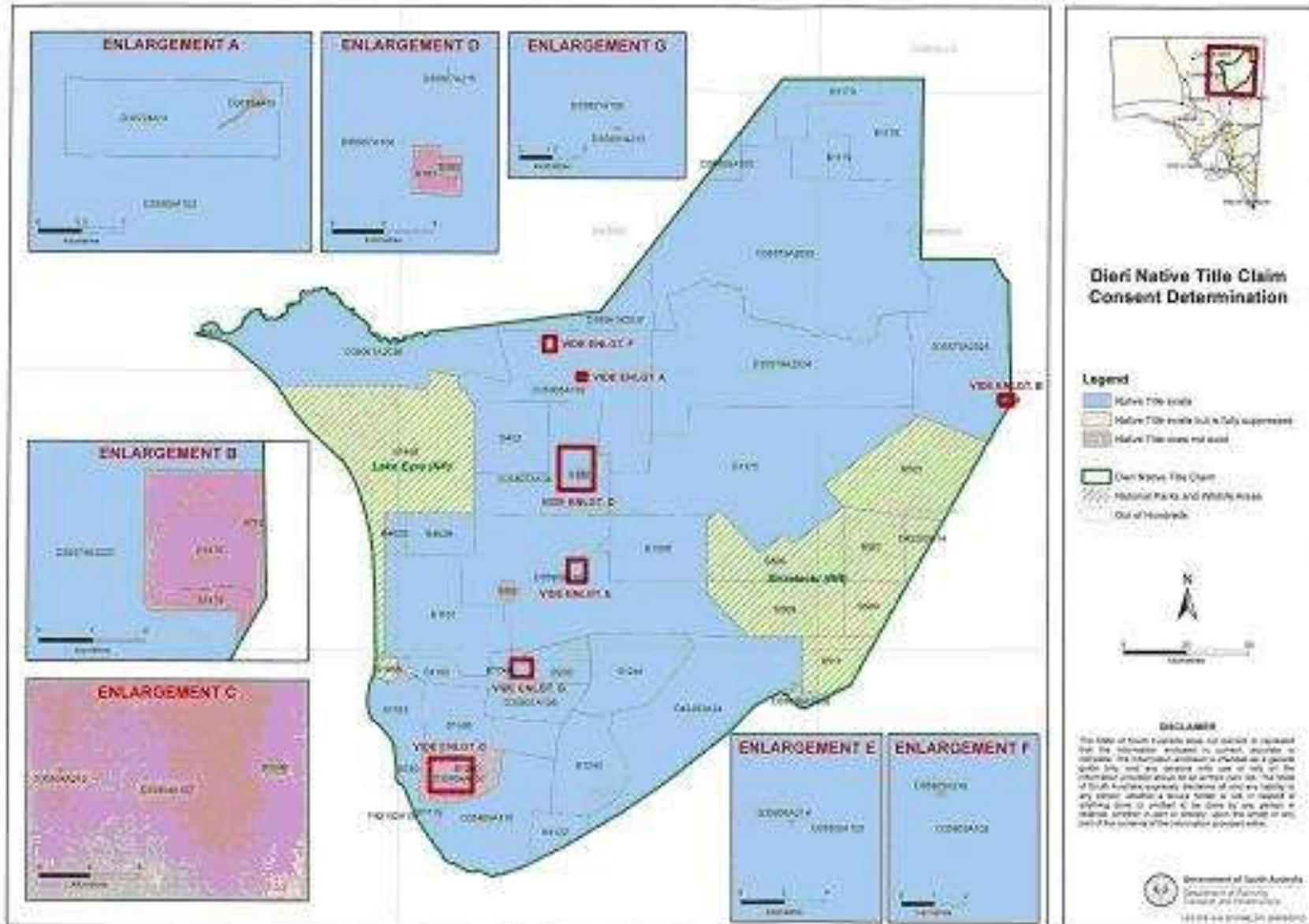
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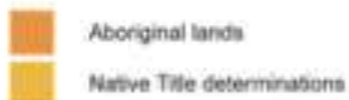
# “Consent determination”

- Covers some 47,000 square kilometres of land, with part of its south-eastern boundary extending into the Strzelecki Regional Reserve and part of its western boundary extending into the Lake Eyre National Park
  - Twice size of Wales, 47 times size of HK
  - A second Consent Determination 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014 added to this land
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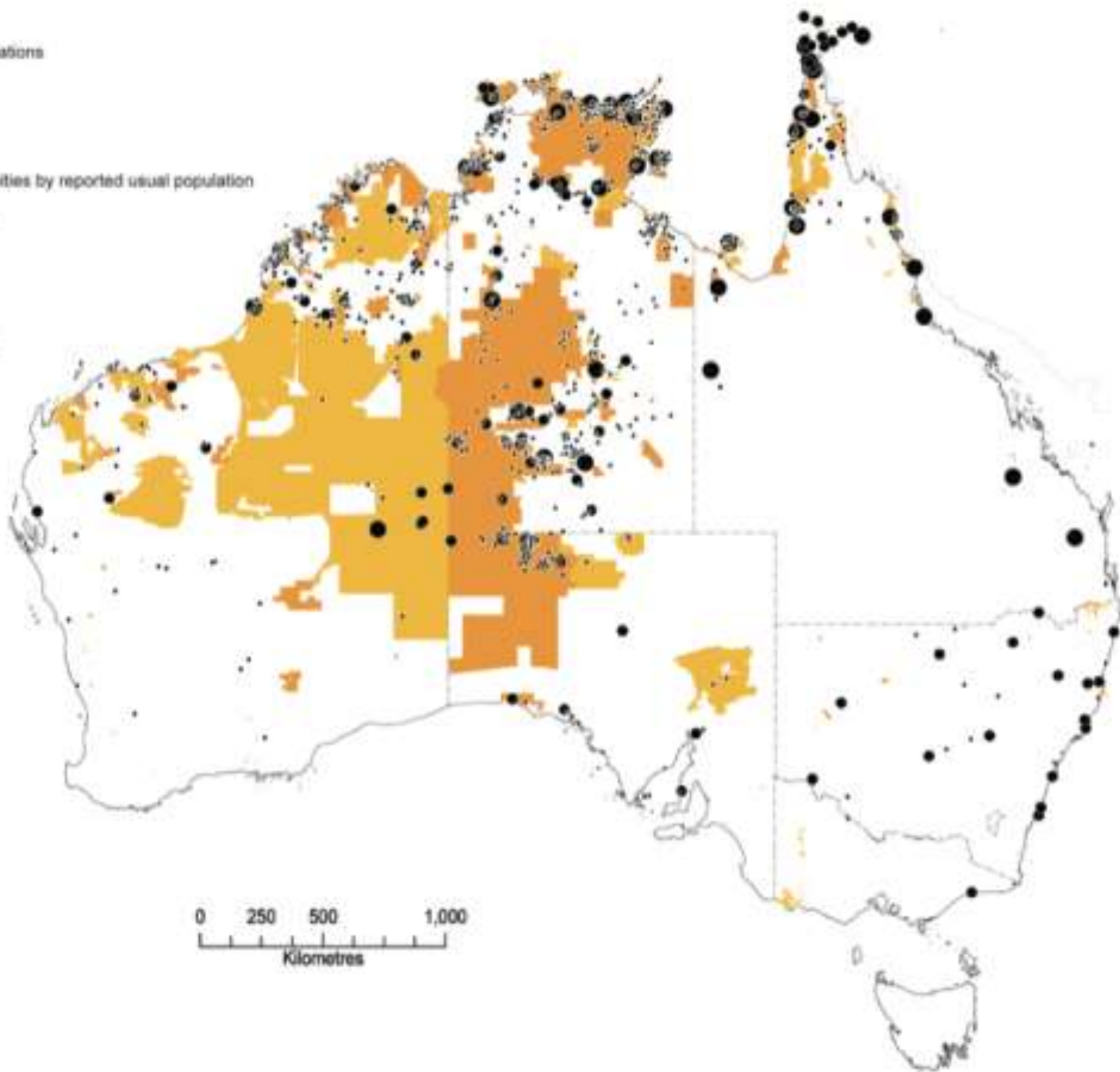
# Consent Determination covers 47,000 km<sup>2</sup>





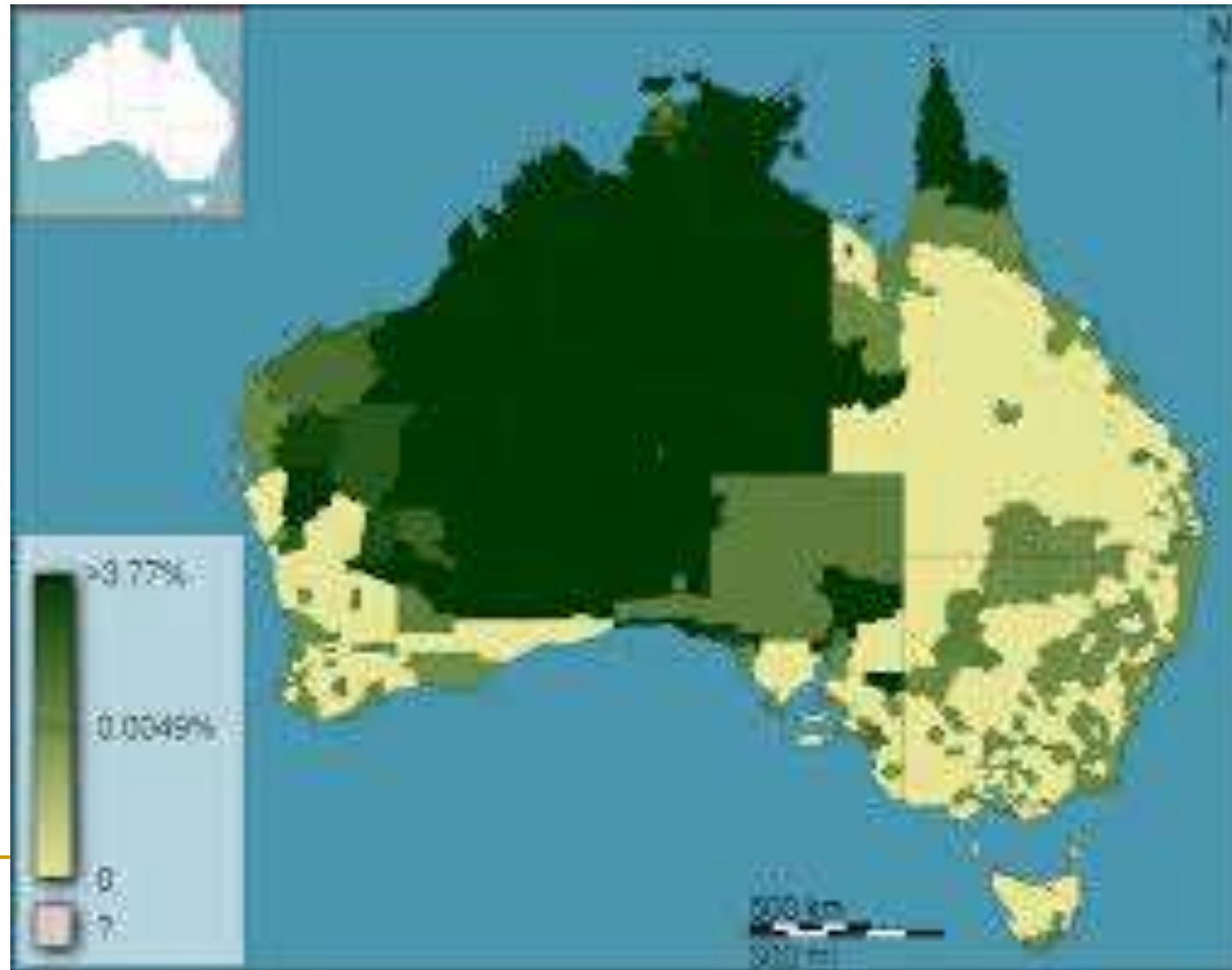
Discrete Indigenous communities by reported usual population

- 500 people or more
- 200 to 499 people
- 50 to 199 people
- Less than 50 people





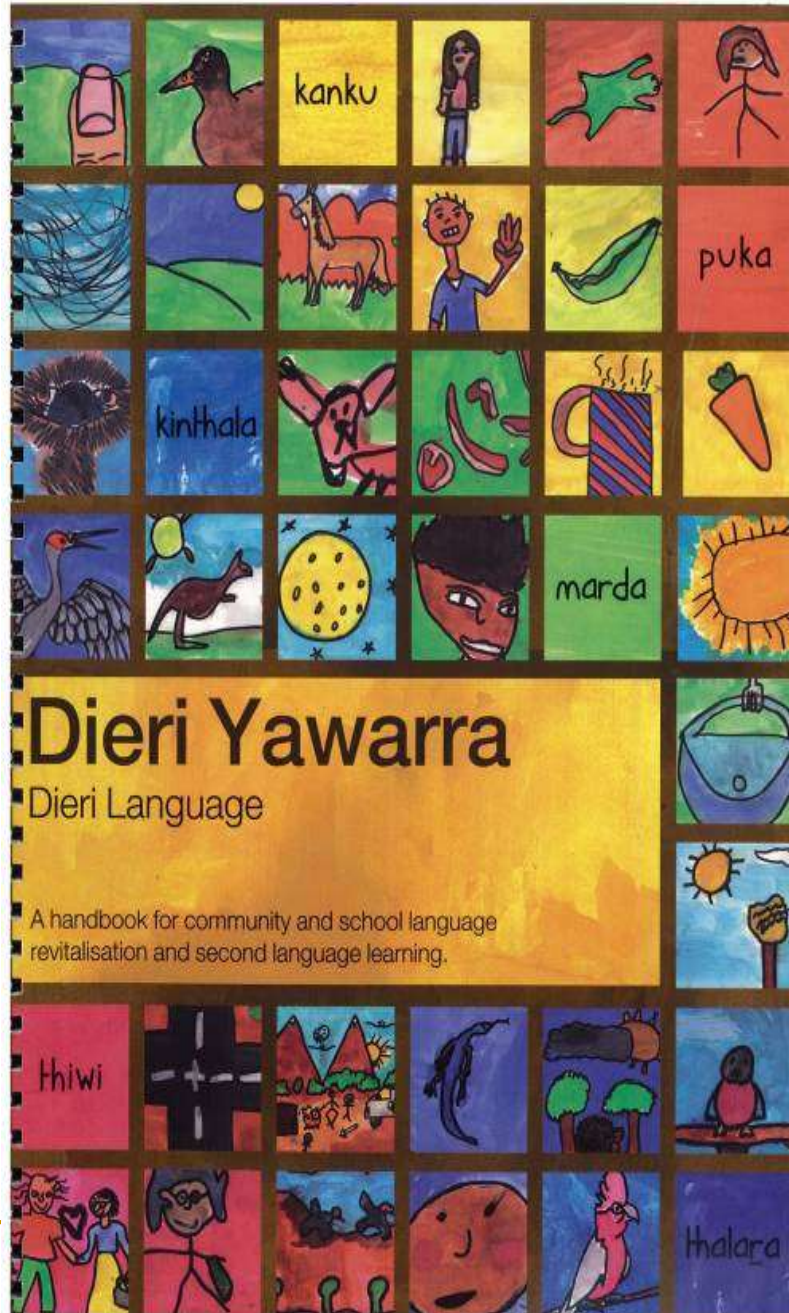
# Speakers of Aboriginal languages 2011



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# Dieri Yawarra project 2008-2010

- Greg Wilson (then at Department of Education and Children's Services) co-ordinated *Dieri Yawarra* resulting in print resource and CD-ROM.
  - Greg worked with Dieri Resources Development Group in Port Augusta, most of whom are now involved with the current ILS project.
  - 15 interactive components introducing learners to Dieri vocabulary and grammar, like *Ngakarni palku* 'my body' or *Karnaya putu* 'people's things'.
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kanku

puka

kinthala

marda

# Dieri Yawarra

Dieri Language

A handbook for community and school language  
revitalisation and second language learning.

thiwi

thalara

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# Ngayana Dieri Yawarra Yathayilha

- 2010-2011 development of language lessons for schools on model of Arabana programme, Powerpoint shows, not published
  - Recordings of 2000 sound files, mostly vocabulary and simple sentences
  - Peter Austin meets Port Augusta group, August 2010, identifies fluency levels
  - Application for ILS grant by DAC 2011
  - Grant awarded July 2012, project began October 2012
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# Auntie Rene Warren 2010



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# ILS project

- 2013 workshops February Adelaide, March Port Augusta, April Adelaide, August Port Augusta
  - Materials development – songs, bilingual dictionary, Willsden Primary school language programme
  - Blog [dieriyawarra.wordpress.com](http://dieriyawarra.wordpress.com)
  - 72 posts, 8,440 page views (as of 2014-12-15), still getting 20-30 views per day
  - Community engagement process
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# Dieri mob February 2013





# Interim summary

- 40 years ago Dieri people were living in tin shacks on the margins of Marree, Port Augusta, Broken Hill





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- Today, 2 generations later, we have major changes:
    - A clear corporate identity
    - Ownership of land
    - Recognition of traditional ownership and relationships with miners
    - Strong political leadership, championing language issues
    - Enthusiastic community participation (10% of DAC participating in each workshop)
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# For the language

- Desire and willingness to learn
  - Good resource base – funds, recordings (Austin 50 hours, Hercus 12 hours, Wilson 2,000 files), grammar, dictionary, talented and well-trained community members (teachers, health professionals, singer etc.), highly experienced teacher-linguist, available linguist who worked with previous generations
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# Challenges

- DAC internal politics
- Fluent speakers all old and very shy, good semi-speakers shy and “expensive”
- Issues of planning, processes and flexibility
- Lack of staff with back office skills
- Monitoring and evaluation lacking
- School programme implementation
- Availability of teacher-linguist and linguist

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■ ...

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# So what did I learn about research?

- My work done 40 years ago turned out to be valuable and useful in ways that I never imagined at the time
  - The data and analysis could be repurposed
  - Metadata is an important key to usability
  - Trying to understand ideologies and beliefs and when they can get in the way is important
  - The theories promoted by linguists (eg. pidginisation as a mechanism for revitalisation, intergenerational transmission as paramount) can be totally rejected by the community
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# and ...

- I had to leave my politics aside and let the participants in the process set agendas (eg. about songs)
  - It was incredibly valuable that I had learnt how to speak Diyari (and could remember how to!)
  - I took risks, even when I was not sure if things would work, and mostly they did
  - I came to understand that sometimes you fail – people were incredibly forgiving and willing to laugh about it and move on
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# From post-vernacular to revitalisation – via documentation

- Documentation needs to be accessible and useful for revitalisation and teaching
    - e.g. conversation, child-directed language, functions
  - Documentation and theorisation of revitalisation needs to be developed
    - and made accessible to activists and practitioners
  - More genuine collaboration is needed
    - including applied linguists
  - Community and disciplinary ideologies need to be explored and taken into account
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# Thank you!

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But address all criticisms to us!

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