



Minister for Employment, Education and Training
Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, 2600

Cav. Lena Gustin, MBE
President, APIA Club Ladies Committee
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21 DEC 1990

Dear Mamma Lena

I am writing in response to your letter of 17 December 1990 to dispel your misapprehension and the misapprehensions of the Italian community that the Commonwealth Government intends to devalue and diminish the teaching and learning of Italian at all levels of education. The Commonwealth has no such intention.

Italian will not be devalued and diminished as a result of recommendations in the Discussion ("Green") Paper on an Australian Literacy and Language Policy. At no time in the process of its development has the Green Paper (or any other Commonwealth document) ever stated that Commonwealth funding for Italian should be reduced. I enclose a copy of the Green Paper, and my press release about it, for your information.

The Green Paper recognises that language learning is justified for three major reasons:

1. for intellectual, educational and cultural enrichment;
2. for pragmatic reasons, relating to the contribution made by language knowledge to economic, diplomatic, strategic, scientific and technological development; and
3. for social reasons, relating to needs for communication within families and throughout the broader Australian community.

Clearly, the teaching and learning of Italian can be justified on each of these grounds.

However, the Green Paper makes no mention of any category of language and explicitly avoids identifying any priority languages for the Commonwealth. It argues that this would be inappropriate as all States and Territories have now developed their own well-balanced language policies which identify priority languages according to their own local needs and objectives. Italian is identified as a priority language in all the State and Territory language policies.

Generally in the area of languages other than English, the Paper states (Goal 2) that the learning of languages other than English in Australia must be substantially increased to enhance educational outcomes and communication both within the Australian community and internationally. It also firmly indicates continuing Commonwealth support.

With regard to funding for the Italian language, the Commonwealth has provided well over \$25 million to teach Italian through the Ethnic Schools Program (ESP) since 1985. Italian has been the major beneficiary of the ESP, receiving well in excess of 60% of the funding since Commonwealth started funding the program in 1981. In 1990, Italian received over \$4,300,000 (67%) over the ESP funds. It is recognised that many of the students in these classes have been of English-speaking background. The Australian Second Language Learning Program has also supported Italian.

The preferred strategy for the ESP outlined in the Discussion Paper (see Section 5.3.3) is to place it, particularly the insertion classes, under the supportive umbrella of education system-based strategies and provision for language teaching without **any diminution of the funding for existing programs provided under it** and with appropriate transition arrangements. Existing Italian classes would therefore continue. Indeed, one could expect that there would be improved support for the program through the closer links established with education systems.

Before policy is finalised in the White Paper, there will be extensive consultation with State and Territory education systems and with major ethnic schools authorities.

Yours sincerely



John Dawkins