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Dr Marlene Goldsmith, MLC, has expressed grave concern about the attitude of the Hawke Government to the teaching of Italian.

In the New South Wales Parliament, Dr Goldsmith this week reported the fears of the Italian community, and placed on the record a letter she had received from Mr Italo Mazzola, Secretary of the Italian Special Branch of the Liberal Party.

"I had the privilege of serving on the Committee of Inquiry set up by Dr Terry Methereil when he was Minister of Education, to examine the teaching of languages in New South Wales," reports Dr Goldsmith.

The Committee established a number of priority languages for this State, and Italian was a very important language on this list.

"Italian is the most widely spoken foreign language in Australia, and consequently we have rich Italian linguistic resources already in the community, resources that should not be neglected.

"It is also the language of the fifth largest economy of the western world, and moreover, the language the descendants of ancient Rome, and of the culture that gave birth to the Renaissance. It is, therefore, a fundamental language of western culture.

"I would be profoundly shocked if the Federal Government were to ignore all these facts, and to ignore the 39,729 young people studying Italian at the primary level alone in NSW.

"I call upon the Federal Minister for Education, Mr Dawkins, to reassure the Italian community and the people of NSW that there will be no downgrading of Italian, and that the teaching of Italian will receive the support it justly deserves," says Dr Goldsmith.