



Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations Inc.

AFMLTA

PO Box 758

Belconnen

ACT 2616

www.afmlta.asn.au

MEDIA RELEASE – 04 October 2011

AUSTRALIA IN THE ASIAN CENTURY – AN EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE

The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) welcomes the Prime Minister's recent announcement of the commissioning of a landmark White Paper on *Australia in the Asian Century*. AFMLTA President, Sherryl Saunders, believes the impetus behind Australia confidently seeking to build a bright future for all Australians in which there is recognition of our place in the Asian region provides a perfect opportunity to review current activity in education generally and languages education in particular.

Ms Saunders said that given the White Paper's explicit focus on naming ways to actively engage with Asia there is a necessary flow-on for the Government to consider how young Australians are educated in ways to engage with Asia. First and foremost will be the capacity of Australians to engage productively in the languages and cultures of Australia and Asia.

The AFMLTA endorses recent statements made by Joseph Lo Bianco, Professor of Language and Literacy Education at The University of Melbourne, to the Radio National "Australia Talks" program of 3 October 2011. Professor Lo Bianco stated unequivocally that addressing the languages education needs of young Australians does not have 'a quick fix answer', rather it requires commitment to a sustained languages policy, building on Australia's history of developing languages programs in Australian schools. Importantly, languages education in the 21st century must have a broader agenda and address general educational goals rather than simply focusing on the functional needs of learners. The AFMLTA joins Professor Lo Bianco in underlining the urgent need to review primary languages programs with a view to working towards quality programs and solid languages education for all primary school students.

Ms Saunders suggested that Professor Lo Bianco's comments be noted by Ken Henry given the intention that the White Paper is to drive public debate and policy for the next 10 to 15 years. Further, given the emphasis on wide-scale reform as a result of the White Paper, there are clear implications for the current work of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

In this context, the AFMLTA calls on ACARA to immediately release the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages Paper. 'The release of this important document is the next step in ensuring the debate about the ways to provide high quality languages education for the coming century actually continues' said Ms Saunders. 'Given the extensive public consultation held earlier this year and the obvious passion for the area, the need to develop curriculum is becoming more urgent and work on the first languages to be developed should commence as soon as possible.'

The AFMLTA and language teachers associations in each State and Territory will continue to advocate for languages education for all students, and for appropriate preparation for and conditions for languages teachers in all schools as a necessary aspect of education for the coming century.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Sherryl Saunders, president@afmlta.asn.au, mobile 0409 878 091

Matthew Absalom, presidentelect@afmlta.asn.au, mobile 0423 197 663