



16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Government Operations

Report on the Review of the
2006-2007 Annual Report of the
Languages Commissioner

Chair: Mr. Kevin Menicoche

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May 23, 2008

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Government Operations is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner and commends it to the House.

Kevin Menicoche, MLA
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER**

The Standing Committee on Government Operations met on April 9, 2008 to review the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner. The Committee would like to thank Ms. Shannon Gullberg, the Languages Commissioner, for appearing before us.

The Committee is glad to see that the Commission's website is now operational and information about the complaints process is available in all Official Languages. The Committee looks forward to seeing the resolution of technical problems, the correction of translation errors, and the timely posting of newly released Commissioner reports in the near future.

During the 15th Assembly, the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight encouraged the Commissioner in its reports to step up her efforts to publicize her office, particularly by undertaking community visits to meet with stakeholders and to raise public awareness about her role and mandate. The Committee is therefore disappointed to hear that the Commissioner's plans to visit Rae, Inuvik and Fort Smith in early 2007 to conduct community and school meetings and to visit health centres were not realized. The Committee is also concerned that none of the Commissioner's \$28,000 travel budget was spent and that the number of inquiries decreased to eleven during the 2006-2007 fiscal year.

Members discussed these concerns with the Commissioner, suggesting that the low numbers of inquiries and complaints demonstrate that the public is not well aware of the office and role of the Language Commissioner. Most inquiries came from Yellowknife and were primarily private sector requests for information. The Committee also noted that only one complaint was filed and that the Commissioner did not conduct any investigations on her own initiative during the 2006-2007 reporting timeframe.

The Committee urges the Commissioner to become more active in planning community visits to promote her role and office and looks forward to seeing the results of her plan to make community visits and the promotion of her office the priority for 2008-2009.

The Committee is disappointed that the two reports the Commissioner had announced during the review of her last year's Annual Report have not yet been

received. During the review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report, the Commissioner announced a report on language services in health care facilities will be tabled during the May/June session of 2008. The Commissioner provided no timelines or details relating to her previously announced report on advertising requirements.

As the Committee discussed with the Commissioner, the responsibility for promotion of Official Languages rests with the Minister. The Committee urges the Commissioner to exercise her powers and make full use of her mandate, which, as outlined in section 20 of the *Official Languages Act*, includes ensuring recognition of the rights, status and privileges of each of the Official Languages and compliance with the spirit and intent of the *Act* in the administration of the affairs of government institutions, and conducting investigations on her own initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the 2006-2007 Annual Report the Commissioner makes two recommendations:

Languages Commissioner Recommendation 1

That the Legislative Assembly and GNWT adopt a uniform policy in regard to the development of websites, including the languages in which website material are available.

The Committee discussed this recommendation with interest, but decided that further considerations need to include existing Government policies addressing visual identity, communication, website protocols and official languages. Furthermore, cost implications and the availability of resources would need to be taken into account.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT conduct a review on its website policies and report back on whether the website policy is in compliance with official languages policies, guidelines and legislation.

Languages Commissioner Recommendation 2

That the Government immediately takes steps to ensure the appropriate training and certification of interpreters and translators, and ensure that there is a registry of interpreters and translators that is available to both the public and private sector.

With the closure of the Aboriginal Languages Section of the Language Bureau in the mid-1990s, the GNWT lost capacity in the areas of language standards, terminology development, training and accreditation. The precarious situation of our Aboriginal languages combined with the declining numbers of mother tongue speakers makes the need to actively address the revitalization of the Aboriginal languages more urgent. In recent years, the former Languages Commissioner and the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act* spoke to the need for capacity building through the development of translation standards as well as training and certification standards for interpreters and translators.

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommended in its "Report on the Review of the 2004-2005 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner" that "... the GNWT work with Aurora College to deliver a basic interpreter/translator training program for Aboriginal languages, as well as specialized training in medical terminology." In its response to the Report, the Government indicated that while it generally supported the idea, it "delegated" responsibility for action to Aurora College and further made any action dependent on "sufficient demand and program funding". The Government's response did not indicate any specific steps towards such an undertaking.

A year later the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommended in its "Report on the Review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner" that "... the GNWT implement a plan for the training and certification of interpreters and translators."

During the review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report, the Standing Committee on Government Operations discussed with the Commissioner the fact that despite repeated recommendations by the Language Commissioner and by Standing Committees of the Legislative Assembly, the GNWT has not made any progress on training programs and certification of Interpreter/Translators for Aboriginal languages.

During this discussion, the Committee also encouraged the Commissioner to follow up on her recommendations in accordance with her mandate and powers under the *Act*. The Committee suggests that the Commissioner include a status section on previous recommendations in future Annual Reports.

The Committee also wishes to point out that the re-establishment of training and certification for Aboriginal languages interpreter/translator programs would be an important step towards language and terminology standardization, which are vital aspects of language revitalization.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT implement a plan for the training and certification of interpreters and translators and establish a registry of interpreters and translators for all official languages.

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight tabled its “Report on the Review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner” on March 12, 2007. The report concluded with motion 58-15(5) requiring the Government to table a comprehensive response to the report within 120 days. The Government did not table a response.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT respond to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight “Report on the Review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner” by addressing all recommendations from the Commissioner and the Committee in its reply to the present report.

In conclusion, the Standing Committee on Government Operations encourages the Commissioner to make the promotion of her role and office her priority and to exercise her powers and make full use of her mandate in accordance with the *Official Languages Act* to ensure the GNWT complies with the spirit and intent of the *Act*.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.