

The Office of the Northwest Territories
Languages Commissioner

Annual Report 2006-2007



Message from the Languages Commissioner



Greetings.

This Annual Report provides an overview of the activities of the Office for the 2006-2007 fiscal year. It also contains recommendations for the future.

Over the course of this year, I have been very impressed by the many language activities that are happening throughout the Northwest Territories. I was thrilled to be invited to speak at the Dene Language Conference in June, and very pleased to be able to speak to students at several schools in the Northwest Territories. These students are the future of our languages. As we look towards the future, let us not forget to look at the stories of the elders and their commitment to languages. As well, let us consider the needs of all language groups and consider ways to best serve all of the people of the Northwest Territories.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions or concerns about this Annual Report, or if you have a complaint or inquiry that should be directed to this office.

Mahsi.

The Past

In 1984, the Legislative Assembly passed its first *Official Languages Act*. Modelled after the Federal Act, it had two essential purposes: the Act guaranteed equal status for the use of English and French by members of the public accessing government programs and services, and the Act officially recognized the Aboriginal languages in use in the Northwest Territories. In 1990, the Legislative Assembly made major amendments to the Act to give greater status to northern Aboriginal languages. Recognizing the official status of Aboriginal languages was intended to preserve and promote Aboriginal cultures through protection of their languages.

The 1990 amendments also created the position of Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories to be appointed by the Legislative Assembly for a term of four years. The Act gave the Languages Commissioner authority to investigate complaints in regard to compliance with the Act, initiate investigations as appropriate, and engage in activities related to the promotion and protection of Official Languages.

In 2001, the Legislative Assembly appointed a Special Committee on the Review of Official Languages (SCOL). In 2003-2004, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) considered and responded to the SCOL report. The end result was that major amendments were made to the Act. Some of those amendments had a direct and significant impact on the Office of the Languages Commissioner:

- Section 20(1) of the *Official Languages Act* used to contain a provision giving the Languages Commissioner a broad mandate, including taking steps to ensure the promotion and preservation of Official Languages. This promotional role was deleted and the position of Languages Commissioner was narrowed to that of an “ombudsman type” role. That is, the role of the Languages Commissioner became one of ensuring compliance with the Act through investigating complaints, handling inquiries and initiating investigations where appropriate.

- The role of promoting and preserving Official Languages was turned over to the newly created position of Minister Responsible for Official Languages. As part of fulfilling this role, the Minister established two Boards – the Official Languages Board and the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board. The Official Languages Board is to review the rights and status of Official Languages and their use in the administration and delivery of services to government institutions. The Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board is responsible for reviewing programs and initiatives dealing with Aboriginal languages, and promoting and revitalizing Aboriginal languages.
- Before the amendments, the Act referred to eight Official Languages (Chipewyan, Cree, Dogrib, English, French, Gwich'in, Inuktitut and Slavey). In the definitions section of the Act, “Slavey” was defined to include North

Slavey and South Slavey, and “Inuktitut” was defined to include both Inuinnaqtun and Inuvialuktun. With the amendments, the Act now clearly identifies North Slavey, South Slavey, Inuinnaqtun and Inuvialuktun as separate Official Languages. As well, “Dogrib” is referred to by its proper name, Tłıchǫ. As such, the Northwest Territories now has 11 distinct Official Languages.

These changes have had a significant impact on the nature of the Office. The Languages Commissioner needs to be available to handle inquiries, investigate complaints and initiate investigations of non-compliance with the Act. This may seem like a step backwards, but the reality is that it allows the Languages Commissioner to act in a truly ombudsman like fashion, and maintain distance from the Legislative Assembly and GNWT. This adds to the independence of the Office.

The Present

Complaints and Inquiries

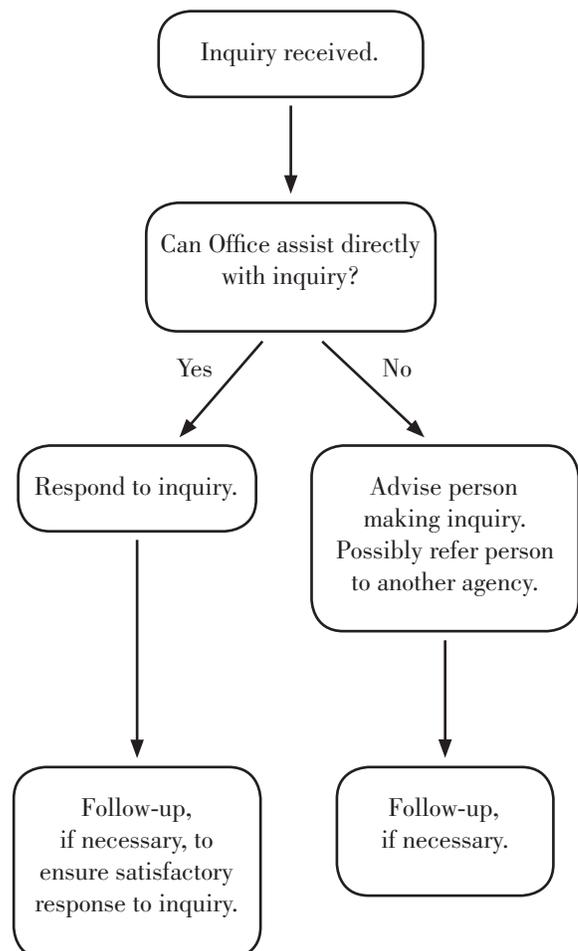
Definitions

- **Inquiry** – A simple request for information, usually related to the status or use of Official Languages, or about the *Official Languages Act*. It does not include any suggestion that a person feels that she or he has been unfairly treated.
- **Complaint** – A complaint involves a situation where a person or group feels that their language rights or privileges have been infringed or denied. They may feel that they have been treated unfairly or have been adversely affected by some policy, program, action or lack of action.
- **Investigation** – A situation where the Languages Commissioner decides to investigate a specific situation or larger systemic issue, regardless of whether a complaint has been filed with the Office.

Inquiry Process

The inquiry process established for the Office is as follows:

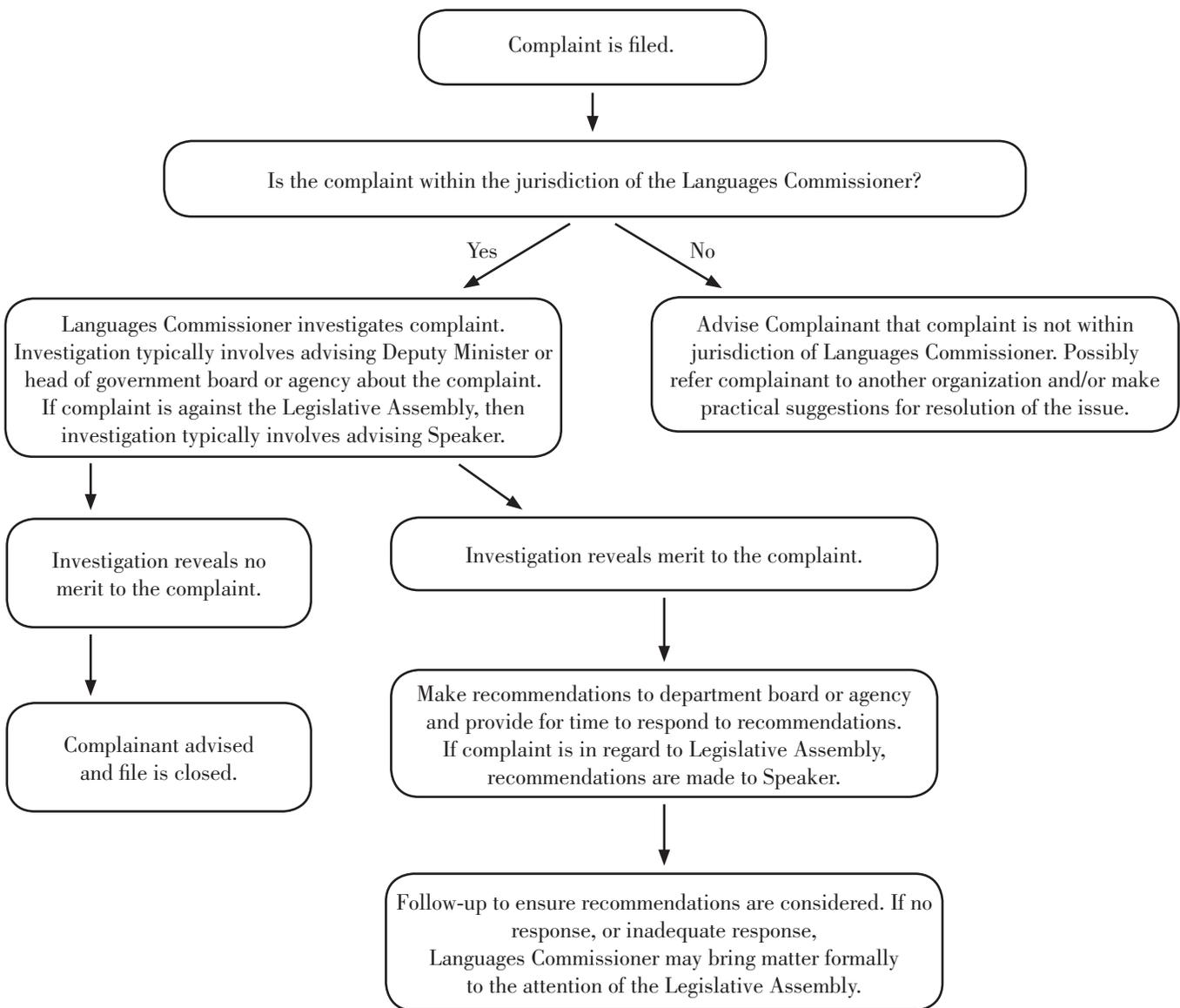
NWT *Official Languages Act* Inquiry Process



Complaint Process

The complaint process established for the Office is as follows:

NWT Official Languages Act Complaint Process



Statistics for 2006-2007

- **Complaints** – In the 2006-2007 fiscal year, the Office received one complaint. The complaint was by a Francophone individual who was unable to obtain a birth registration form in French. The Languages Commissioner was able to obtain the form for the individual. The Office continues to look at the broader issues that such a case raises.
- **Inquiries** – In the 2006-2007 fiscal year, the Office received 11 inquiries. Four of these were in relation to obtaining translations of words for various purposes. Of note is that all four requests were from the private sector. This is significant in that the private sector has no legal obligation to provide for signage or materials in any particular Official Language. These inquiries appear to be genuine attempts to be responsive to the language needs of the people of the North. Two other inquiries were in relation to complaints regarding the ability to obtain trained interpreters/translators. In both cases, the Languages Commissioner referred the individuals to the Language Bureau. Of note, again, is that both of the calls were from the private sector. Two other inquiries were in regard to obtaining

educational materials on Official Languages of the Northwest Territories. In regard to one of these inquiries, the person was referred to the Language Bureau. In regard to the other inquiry, the materials requested were of a general nature and available at the Office. Two other inquiries were in regard to a request to review the language policy of the organization in question. As one of these was a private sector business, the Languages Commissioner was unable to provide any comment, as there is no obligation on the part of the private sector to provide services in any particular language. In regard to the other, the Languages Commissioner was able to provide the internal organization with some general guidance in regard to its obligations under the *Official Languages Act*. The last inquiry was in regard to obtaining support for literacy issues. The Languages Commissioner was able to refer the individual on to two external organizations.

What impresses me most in regard to these statistics is that the private sector continues to show concern for providing materials in various Official Languages, in providing a workplace that is sensitive to language issues, and in learning more about Official Languages.

Budget

Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages

Fiscal Year 2006-2007
at March 31, 2007

	2006-2007 Main Estimates	Expenditures	Free Balance
Compensation and Benefits			
Salaries	31,000.00	28,365.00	2,635
Benefits	0	0	0
Total Compensation and Benefits	\$31,000 .00	\$28,365.00	\$2,635
Other Operating Expenses			
Travel and Transportation	28,000.00	0	28,000.00
Materials and Supplies	20,000.00	11,076.25	8,923.75
Purchased Services	20,000.00	12,364.16	7,635.84
Utilities	0	0	0
Contract Services	56,000.00	39,358.97	16,641.03
Fees and Payments	15,000.00	15,600.00	(600)
Other Expenses	5,000.00	0	5,000.00
Tangible Assets	0	0	0
Computer Hardware and Software	5,000	0	5,000.00
Total Other Operating Expenses	\$149,000.00	\$78,399.38	\$70,600.62
TOTAL FOR THE OFFICE	\$180,000.00	\$106,764.38	\$73,235.62

Highlights

Web Site

The new web site is working quite well. However, several individuals have advised the office of a few translation errors and other technical problems they have noticed. These are being worked on, but as a whole, the web site is a fast and easy way to access information about the Office and the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories.

Promotion of the Office

Radio advertisements for the Office were run on CBC Radio, CJCD, Radio Taiga and CKLB (Aboriginal station). The advertisements, which promoted the Office, were heard in all 11 Official Languages.

The Languages Commissioner also had an opportunity to meet with various groups and individuals during the course of the year. Some highlights include:

- A visit to Hay River that included speaking to a group at the Dene Cultural Institute and the Princess Alexandra School.
- Facilitating a social studies class at École St. Patrick High School in Yellowknife.
- Hosting the opening evening and speaking at Dene Language Conference in Yellowknife.

- Speaking at a conference on women and leadership sponsored by MACA.
- Participating and speaking at the Federal Government Executive Leadership Tour.

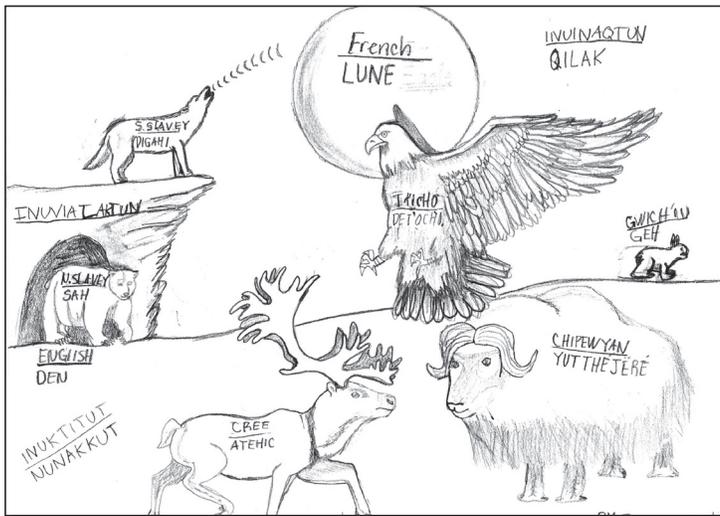
Poster Contest

There was also a poster contest for all school-age children in the Northwest Territories.

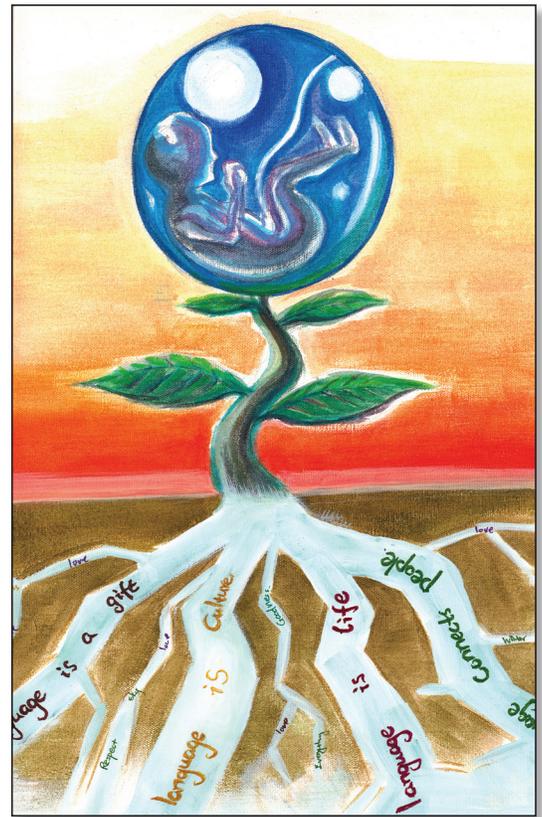
Congratulations to:

- **Jasmine St. John**
Grade 3, Ecole Boreal School, Hay River
- **Darian Modeste**
Grade 6, Mildred Hall School
- **Ramona Menicoche**
Grade 9, Thomas Simpson School,
Fort Simpson
- **Nate Huang**
Grade 12, Thomas Simpson School,
Fort Simpson

These students have each won \$100.00 as well as a \$300.00 prize for their schools, to be put towards an event that promotes or celebrates the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories. These posters will be used to create promotional materials for the Office.



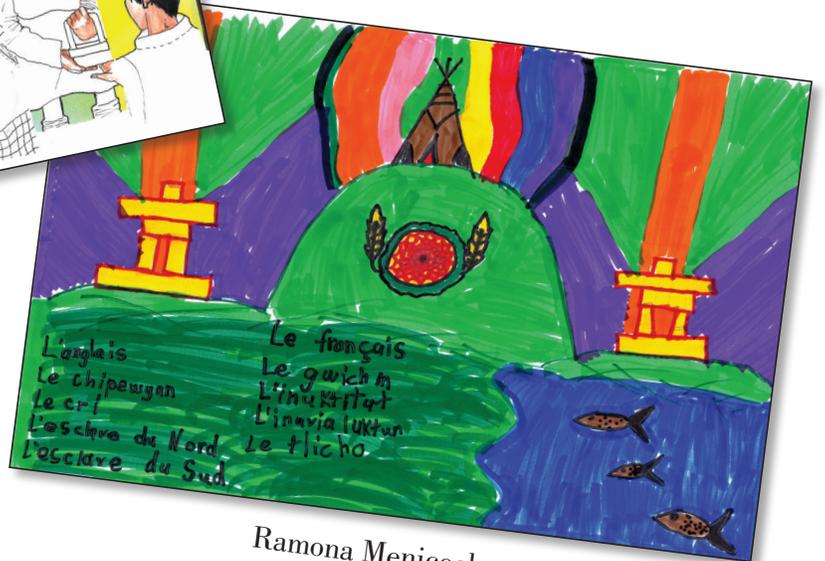
Darian Modeste



Nate Huang



Jasmine St. John



Ramona Menicoche

The Future

Recommendations for Change

1. Web Sites –

More That Just a Pretty Picture

In this technological age, web sites are a common and relatively easy way of obtaining information.

As things stand, the Legislative Assembly and GNWT have no common practice on the development of web sites, and no policy in regard to the languages in which web site materials are to be available. Departments and agencies are responsible for their own web site development. This has created a great divergence in terms of the type of information available on web sites and the languages in which the information is available.

Section 11 of the *Official Languages Act* deals with the issue of communication to the public. There is no obligation on government departments to maintain a web site. Further, it is questionable whether a web site is “communication” per se – at best, it tends to be a very passive form of communication, as many web sites are not interactive. The appeal of the decision in the

Fédération franco-ténoise c. Procureur général du Canada case will provide some clarity on this issue. Regardless of the outcome of that appeal, there is little doubt that web sites can be an excellent means of providing general information. As such, the Legislative Assembly and GNWT should consider a uniform approach to the creation of web sites. Based on the experiences of this Office, consideration should be given to the following:

- Ensuring that all information on the web site is available in English and French.
- Ensuring that basic information is available in all Aboriginal Official Languages. This should include contact information.
- Contact information should be available in an audio format, so that those individuals who have difficulty with the written language can access the department or agency.
- Options to allow the sight impaired to more easily access the web site.

These are just suggestions on the structuring of web sites. The intent of this recommendation is not to dampen the independence of government departments. Rather, the intent is to ensure that the government is proactive in meeting the needs of the citizens of the Northwest Territories.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Legislative Assembly and GNWT adopt a uniform policy in regard to the development of web sites, including the languages in which web site materials are available.

2. Translators and Interpreters – Accessing this Resource

In the last Annual Report, it was stressed that there is an urgent need to ensure the proper training and certification of translators and interpreters, and that there be a registry of translators and interpreters that is available to both the public and private sector.

Again this year, it is clear from the inquiries to this Office that the public is frustrated with the availability and certification of interpreters and translators in both the private and public sector. The government must immediately take steps to rectify this situation.

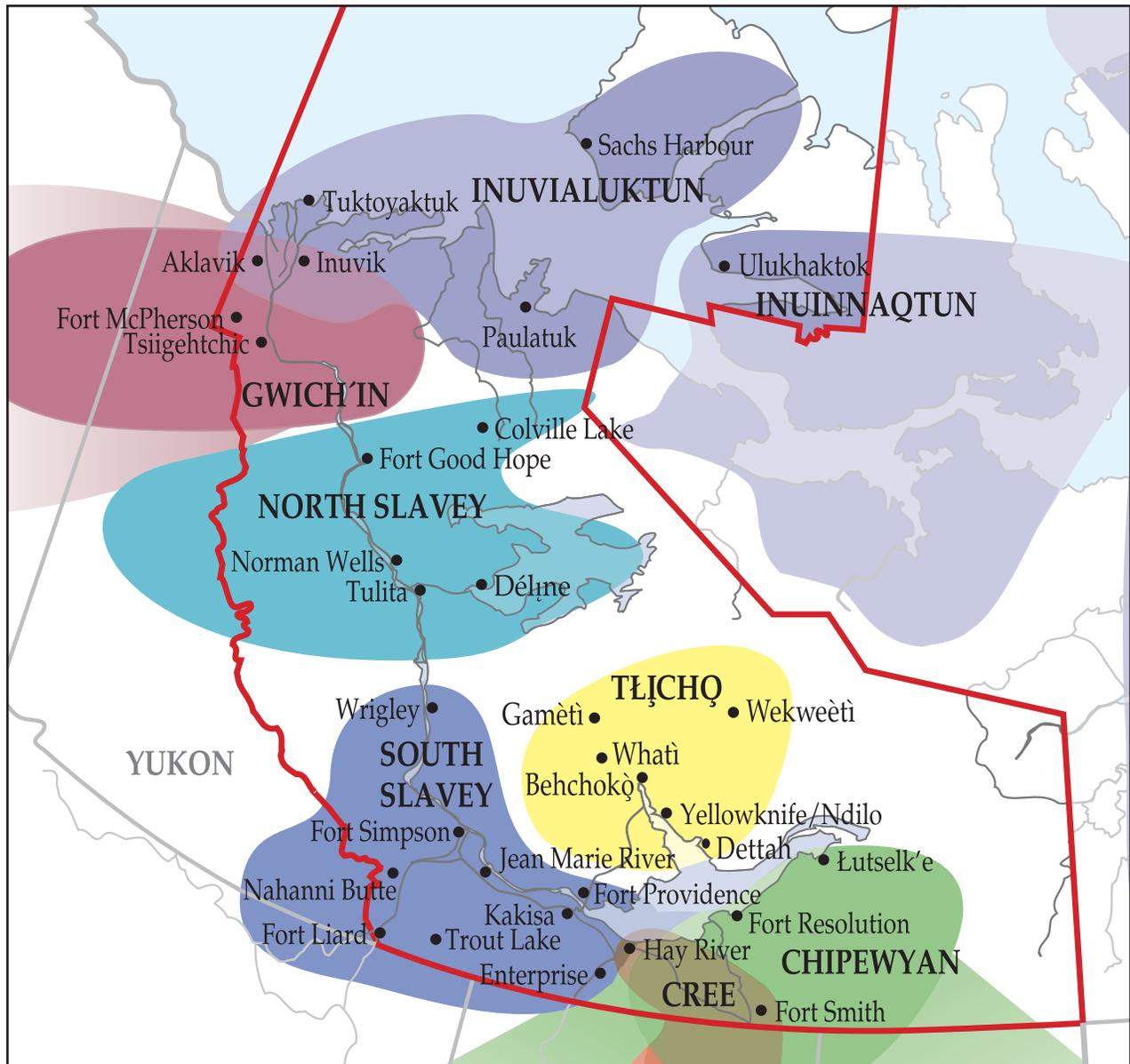
RECOMMENDATION

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.

Summary of Recommendations

1. That the Legislative Assembly and GNWT adopt a uniform policy in regard to the development of web sites, including the languages in which web site materials are available.
2. That the government immediately take steps to ensure the appropriate training 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.

Official Languages of the Northwest Territories



FRENCH is mostly spoken in Hay River, Fort Smith, Inuvik and Yellowknife.
ENGLISH is spoken throughout the Northwest Territories.
INUKTITUT is mostly spoken in Yellowknife.

How To Contact Us

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