

I am writing to you from Adelaide, Australia as a descendant of both paternal and maternal Scottish ancestors with a keen passion for my ancestry and Scottish heritage and culture.

I am the convenor of the Clan MacNeil Association of Australia which has 70 active members as well as friends of the clan representing a further 60 families.

I am grateful that my wife and children have had the opportunity to visit Scotland and we have a number of friends now who live in both the Inner and Outer Hebrides.

My study of the history of the people of Scotland has shown that Gaelic was the major language of the country from 500 AD to 1500 AD after which English became widely used over the next 500 years to the present day.

It is extremely pleasing to visit the island of Barra where Gaelic is used in daily conversation. Road and place signage is shown in Gaelic and English.

So much of our social history, much of which was handed down from one generation to the next by word, literature, song and poetry has been communicated in Gaelic that it represents a vital part of our culture and heritage.

The translation of text from Gaelic to English has in many instances lost the true meaning of the original communication.

I believe that Gaelic represents more than just the language of our ancestors but is a part of our culture. Accordingly I believe that it is an important part of our society today and is a part of the values of Scottish lifestyle in the 21st century.

My observations are of a person living far away from Scotland and I am one of many descendants of Scottish ancestors who retain a passion for Scottish traditions and heritage. Our family ancestry links to the land of Scotland and the traditions of the past. The history is closely bound with the Gaelic language which must be preserved.

I am learning Gaelic from tapes and workbooks purchased from Canan, Isle of Skye as well as "Pools of digital teaching materials" in Gaelic at Craigard, North Uist. I would like to be able to learn by "total immersion" in an environment where Gaelic only is spoken, but this is not possible here in Australia.

I am hopeful with telecommunications that it may become possible to use the broadband to connect to a "chat room" at a reasonable cost for say ½ hour once per week. The secret is to listen to the dialogue as regularly as possible and at present I am doing this every day for 15 minutes.

I wish you well in your project and you have my complete support.

Yours aye,

John McNeil

Adelaide, Australia