



Com.It.Es.

Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero
South Australia

22nd October 2021

Prof Colin Stirling
Vice Chancellor and President
Flinders University

RE: Italian at Flinders University

Dear Prof Stirling,

As you are aware the University has stated its intentions to close the Italian department and cease the teaching of Italian at Flinders University.

Com.It.Es South Australia is the elected representative body of Italians' abroad, and we are heavily opposed to this decision. We believe that the full closure of Italian studies and the department will have significant repercussions for the wider South Australian community on many fronts, and will affect the ability to create future graduates especially Italian teachers with the necessary skills to teach in our public and private schools thus creating a significant skills shortage in the sector. It also must be highlighted that the South Australian and Italian governments are currently finalising a renewal of a MoU for the teaching of Italian in South Australian schools. This commitment by the South Australian government further highlights the importance of the Italian language, and the ability for students to have tertiary opportunities available.

Furthermore this decision also goes against the many opportunities that exist between Italy and South Australia including but not limited to;

1. The Italian community of South Australia comprises of 140,000 people.
2. At the 2016 Census, Italian is still the #1 spoken language at home and heavily taught at schools which receive Italian government funding to provide assistance to teach Italian.
3. Italian is the 4th largest taught language in the world.
4. Italian companies have recently invested in South Australia especially within the newly established space sector, providing the need for Italian speakers to be employed by these companies such as Leonardo, Enel Green Power, SITAEL, Nice, Thales and Aizoon.
5. In November of 2017, Fincantieri and CETENA awarded \$310,000 to the Flinders University team of researchers within the Centre for Maritime Engineering, Control and Imaging, which established a partnership between Flinders University and CETENA, benefitting the students and academics of Flinders University.
6. Italy has 217 companies in Australia, and Italy is one of Australia's largest trading partner with two-way goods estimated at \$11.1 billion and \$383 million in South Australia alone.
7. South Australia has a formal diplomatic relationship with Italy, with the posting of a local Consulate and diplomatic team, only matched to China and Greece.

Com.It.Es South Australia
(Committee for Italians Abroad)
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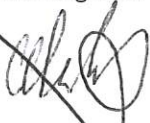
We believe that the reasons listed above actually show how valuable the promotion and teaching of Italian can be for students, especially given the strong love Australians have for Italy and all things 'Made In Italy'. Also it is important to note, that Italy is a G7 country and has significant companies based in Australia such as; Ferrero, Luxottica, Barilla, Smeg, Leonardo, Lavazza, Fiat Chrysler, and the many more fashion and food and beverage companies that import into Australia. The strong economic and cultural bilateral relationship between our countries is so strong, that in fact Italy is still under promoted in many ways and people do not realise how we lead the ways in many scientific and engineering fronts worldwide with many opportunities available to those who can be bi-lingual. Based on these facts alone, we would argue that there would not be any other language which remains at Flinders University that would create the same economic and cultural benefit to Australia that Italy has been successful in over these years.

As you may be aware Com.It.Es also initiated an online petition to raise awareness of this issue within the Italian and Australian communities and business sectors. In such a short time we had an astounding response of more than 4,000 signatures now received, which I have attached to this letter. Also, we are aware that the Hon John Gardner MP Minister for Education, the Hon Vincent Tarzia MP, the Hon Frank Pangallo MLC and Mr Steve Georganas MP have written letters or moved motions on the floor of parliament in support against this decision.

Prof Stirling, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss this, but I trust that with some of these other facts that may have been overlooked by the University, and we feel that the University is making a serious mistake and needs to protect the teaching of Italian, and work with all key stakeholders to make it as successful as possible.

Italy and the Italian community has been generous to the University providing students, grants and funds towards Italian academic positions, and therefore we ask the University in this time to reciprocate that generosity in the past and overturn this decision.

Kind Regards,



Dr Christian Verdicchio
President Com.It.Es South Australia

CC: The Hon John Gardner Minister for Education
The Hon Susan Close MP Shadow Minister for Higher Education

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