

**Reconciliation and Citizenship;**  
**Not Just a Challenge – an Opportunity for all Australians**

I want first to acknowledge country. I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the country this conference is being held on. I also pay respect to the Elders, both Indigenous and other Australian, who are with us today.

As Patrick Dodson, founding Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, told the National Press Club three years ago, we have to ask ourselves, what Australians want to be:

‘Together, indigenous and other Australians are called on to choose the path we now take. Our choices will determine the future shape of our nation.

‘Will it be a nation which lives in harmony because it has healed the wounds of its past with generosity of spirit and wisdom of intellect? Or will it be a nation where the wounds created by dispossession and injustice still fester, and where the same old conflicts still linger, because the imperative of reconciliation did not inform crucial decisions?’

- **Image – Cartoon by Bill Leak - Prime Minister lighting ‘candle’ held by Patrick Dodson and blowing him up [to be shown during the reading of the above quote]**

At the Australian Reconciliation Convention, ‘Renewing the Nation’, in 1997 Dr Faith Bandler echoed this message:

In this climate of callousness, where moves to dismantle structures of democracy are heavily overshadowing us, our task now is to use our voices, our energy, our will and our talents to mobilise the forces for good. I am sure we can demolish these forces of destruction under the banner of justice for all.

But we must act today, because tomorrow it may be too late.

These two quotes embrace the themes I want to explore today. Firstly, Patrick puts in front of us the choice and decision we must take about the future shape of our nation. Then Faith puts in front of us the urgency and the bravery required to take that decision.

We have the chance, and it may be our last chance for quite some time, to go forward into the new millennium in the vision of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation:

**A united Australia which respects this land of ours;**

**Values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage;  
And provides justice and equity for all.**

Today is about the future. But in an Aboriginal world view the past, the present and the future are interconnected, like everything in Aboriginal culture. For this reason, I want to take another look at Australian history in terms of the attitudes and values and the frames of reference which have made Australians what we are – both Indigenous and other Australians. Firstly, some of these mindsets have survived into the present. Secondly, history for Aboriginal people is not something dead and gone. It is a living breathing burden that we carry every day of our lives – the more so when wounds have been re-opened by the Stolen Generations inquiry.

The invasion and colonisation of this country is not 200 years ago as the 1988 Bicentennial encouraged many people to think. Some massacres are within living memory. All over the country stories are handed down in family tradition. And over the last decade there have been the most graphic possible reminders, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Stolen Generations Inquiry.

There is a school of thought that says the physical landscape has shaped in a major way who and what we are as Australians – the garden of eden, the unforgiving land, the sunburnt country, the land of sweeping plains, etc. The same landscape is dotted with signposts of horror and guilt - Slaughterhouse Creek, Poison Swamp Creek, Murdering Flat, Blackfellow's Leap, Myall Creek, Coniston and all the others. We need to think about what has this done to the collective psyche of mainstream Australia.

- **Image – Map of recorded massacre sites in Victoria; from ‘Healing The Land’ by Judith Monticone, 1999**

As Paul Keating said at Redfern Park, seven years ago now, Australians need to think how they would feel if this happened to them, to know where we are coming from:

... it might help if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of land we had lived on for fifty thousand years – and then imagined ourselves told it had never been ours.

Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told it was worthless.

Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in the defence of our land, and then were told in history books that we had given up without a fight.

Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians had served their country in peace and war and were then ignored in history books.

Imagine if our feats on the sporting field had inspired admiration and patriotism and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice.

Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed.

Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it.

- **Image – Cover of *Beyond A Joke: An Anti-Bicentenary Cartoon Book* – ‘Caution - Feral Humans – Next 200 Years’**

It is not about guilt, but it has to be about shame. If there are things in Australian history we can all be proud of, there are also things we all should be ashamed of. As the Governor General said in 1996:

... true reconciliation ... is not achievable in the absence of acknowledgement by the nation of the wrongfulness of the past dispossession, oppression and degradation of the Aboriginal peoples... Where there is no room for national pride or national shame about the past, there can be no national soul.

A fundamental issue really, especially for a conference that explores the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Australian citizenship, is that the Indigenous people of this country were not recognised as citizens for almost 70 years after Federation, and that, even after that recognition, there is a real difference between having rights on paper and being able to exercise and enjoy those rights.

100 years ago Aboriginal people were excluded from the debates about Federation, then mentioned just twice in the 1901 Constitution, both times to be excluded - from the census and from the lawmaking powers of the Commonwealth. The first act of the new parliament was the Immigration Restriction Act, which enacted the White Australia Policy. Aboriginal people were excluded from employment by the post office, which meant the public service, from pensions and maternity allowances, from enlistment in the Armed Forces from 1909 up to 1951; the list goes on.

At the first Native Welfare conference of federal and state Ministers and officials responsible for Aboriginal Affairs in 1937, the WA Chief Protector said:

‘The different States are creating institutions for the welfare of the native race, and, as a result of this policy, the native race is increasing. What is to be the limit? Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were ever any aborigines (sic) in Australia?’

A O Neville, WA Chief Protector,  
at first Native Welfare conference 1937

That conference inaugurated the ‘new policy’ of assimilation to make Aboriginal people eventually the same as other Australians. Aboriginal people could in effect have citizen rights only by becoming, over time, less Aboriginal. When Exemption Certificates were introduced for supposedly more ‘advanced’ Aboriginal people, they could be revoked if people continued to associate with family. This policy actually denied to Aboriginal people the right to be a citizen of this country. But the point of course was that we were not citizens at that time.

**Image – copy of Exemption Certificate**

**[To be shown during the reading of the above para]**

### **White Australia**

White Australia was the reason for this exclusion of Aboriginal people. Australia was based on the most fundamental denial of rights. Captain Cook’s claiming of Australia as Crown land on the basis of the legal fiction of terra nullius – land belonging to no one – denied the property rights, the humanity and even the existence of Aboriginal people. The White Australia Policy then defined Australia as White. Generations of Australians grew up with that White-European frame of reference.

This is why Reconciliation is a matter of generational change and education is the key. We have to change the frame of reference of Australians so that Aboriginal issues are no more out there on the margins, at the fringes of consciousness, but at the heart of debate. We achieve this by making Aboriginal Australia integral to the education of all students, a natural part of the socialisation of all Australians.

### **What is Reconciliation?**

Broadly speaking, Reconciliation is about recognition, rights and reform. It is recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original peoples of this land, and it is recognising the Aboriginal history of this land,

both the long Aboriginal history before the invasion, and the shared history since. Reconciliation is recognising the rights that flow from being the first peoples, as well as our rights as Australian citizens in common with all other citizens. It is about reforming systems to address the disadvantages suffered by Indigenous peoples and, as I have said, it is about changing the frame of reference of all Australians to include Aboriginal Australia.

There are many issues of recognition. As Professor Mary Kalantzis said at the Australian Reconciliation Convention:

‘The call for inclusion and recognition is not one that stems from charity or the heart. It is a call for accounting properly for contributions genuinely made.

‘Constitutional reform that allows for an inclusive sense of belonging is a critical part of renewal and reconciliation.’

- **Image – Aboriginal ‘diggers’, World War II.**

**[to be shown during the reading of the above quote]**

One of the most contentious issues of recognition is the Aboriginal dead of the frontier wars. Almost 20 years ago in 1981 Henry Reynolds wrote in ‘The Other Side of the Frontier’:

How, then, do we deal with the Aboriginal dead? White Australians frequently say ‘all that’ should be forgotten. But it will not be. It cannot be. Black memories are too deeply, too recently scarred. And forgetfulness is a strange prescription coming from a community which has revered the fallen warrior and emblazoned the phrase ‘Lest we Forget’ on monuments throughout the land.

- **Image – ‘Lest We Forget: 20,000 Blacks Killed by 1900’, photomontage by Anne Stephen, 1981; made into a postcard.**

**[to be shown throughout the above quote]**

Another issue is recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as first peoples. As Mick Dodson wrote in ‘Walking Together’ earlier this year, there must be ‘recognition and understanding by the Australian Nation State of our distinctive status as first peoples. This must be the starting point’. An acceptable preamble to the Australian Constitution must include recognition of Indigenous custodianship of the land, as the 1998 Constitutional Convention recommended. There must be an apology for the Stolen Generations and for all the impacts of invasion on Aboriginal peoples across the country. As Malcolm Fraser wrote in *Walking Together* earlier this year:

....An apology above all is recognition that something wrong was done and we regret that it happened. It is perhaps the most important thing we can do which is within our power to address matters of the spirit. There will never be reconciliation with Aboriginal people and other Australians unless we understand that there are both material and spiritual issues involved.

The most fundamental prerequisite is social justice. Aboriginal people have always said there can be no reconciliation without justice – and that means Social Justice. Social justice is not something abstract, but what happens to people on the ground, well defined by Mick Dodson in his first annual report as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner:

Social justice must always be considered from a perspective which is grounded in the daily lives of indigenous Australians. Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with an adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to a school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.

Social justice means dealing with issues of the so-called ‘level playing field’ and claims that ‘blacks get too much’, when in fact on every social indicator Indigenous people are still the most disadvantaged of all Australians. There is still a hangover from colonial times, bitter resistance in some quarters to any special provision for Indigenous people. But the point is that treating people ‘equally’ when they are not equal to start with only institutionalises inequality.

One particularly important issue which relates both to recognition and to social justice is racism. Australians need to recognise the undeniable fact that racism exists in this country – at times from both sides of the racial divide. At the same time freedom from racism is fundamental to social justice. And the absence of racism is essential to real equal citizenship.

Reconciliation demands action, not just words on paper. There are levels of responsibility from the national down to the local, and from the local level up. The Commonwealth has a particular responsibility to provide leadership and must also take the lead role in facilitating constitutional reform to

guarantee social justice. State and Territory and local governments are responsible for delivering most of the services to which all citizens are entitled, and as such the main role is theirs. Sectors such as education, and both union and employer groups, have their responsibilities. But we have to be aware that none of these agencies will fulfil their responsibilities unless Reconciliation becomes a people's imperative. It is the humble actions of individuals that add up to the collective will which governments cannot ignore.

The Prime Minister has pledged his government to achieving Reconciliation in terms of addressing health, education and employment outcomes, but needs to understand also the importance of matters of the spirit, such as an apology and recognition of Aboriginal Australia. The eyes of the world will be on Australia in the lead-up to the 2000 Olympics. At the same time the centenary of the Australian nation-state makes Australians think about what is Australia. The Reconciliation debate, in changing the mindset of Australians, can make a critical contribution to this nation being able to define for ourselves what is Australia, who are Australians and what is Australian citizenship.

### **Citizenship**

Clearly citizenship is about rights and obligations. Most people agree on what citizen rights are, but defining what are the obligations each citizen owes and to whom is more complex and demands a greater level of consensus and shared vision. In Aboriginal world view all rights are inextricably linked to obligations, part of a reciprocal network of rights and obligations in all relationships.

It seems to me that citizenship in the civic sense must be about participation in the life of the community, as a full member of that society. That means citizenship has to be about belonging. There needs to be both knowledge and awareness of the political and social systems involved and there needs to be a level of shared faith in those systems. The greatest problem of contemporary society is alienation – and no one has more reason to be alienated than Aboriginal people. What is needed is a sense of belonging for all citizens.

Citizenship should unite all Australians; it should be something we are all proud to be part of. It is a matter of shared values and identity. There has been a lot of focus on differences among Australians. We need to focus

more on what we have in common, what might unite us as Australians. The debate on Reconciliation is central to and can be an essential resource for the wider debate on what is Australia and who are Australians – a tool to define all of us honestly.

Talking of identity brings us to the ‘real Australian’ question, one of the main themes of intellectual debate in this country. This search for the ‘real Australian’ has always been a White Australian preoccupation. It has never been an issue for Aboriginal people. We are grown up learning exactly who we are and the relationships that make up our identity. I want to suggest that the real reason why Australian identity has always been such a problem for other Australians is simply because the Aboriginal element was left out.

I want to suggest now some of the issues and the heritage and identity that Australians share in common.

First, I want to quote to you the words of Lady Deane, wife of the Governor General and an inspirational leader in her own right, speaking at the Reconciliation Convention:

What indigenous women want for their families and communities – good health, effective education, a minimum standard of housing, safety, self-respect, a sense of place and purpose – is very much what I want for my own family and those who are close to me.

... They aspire, like all women, to full equality of opportunity, to be treated with respect and protected from exploitation and violence and to have the diversity of their roles and responsibilities recognised and valued.

To reinforce what Lady Deane has said, we have seen in the last few years an army of other Australians across the country supporting our struggle.

Sharing our history means honouring Australians who have stood up for Aboriginal rights over the years. Recognising how many other Australians have always wanted to belong to this land, for example, most White Australian art has always been basically about land. Recognising also the people who are sometimes called ‘white blackfellows’ – other Australians who lived with Aboriginal people over the years, learning to belong to the land, assimilating Aboriginal values and ways of seeing.

Many of the so-called ‘typical Aussie’ characteristics come equally from Aboriginal society, and some cannot really be properly explained any other way, for example the well-known Australian egalitarianism comes equally from Aboriginal society in the first place.

Sharing our heritage means recognising what Aboriginal Australia has contributed to Australia: war service, the outback cattle industry, sports stars, and more recently art. Also a sense of the power of the Dreaming in Australian arts, a vividness in Australian language largely based on image and metaphor, eg. flash talk, big smoke, sit down money; elements of the Aussie sense of humour.

- **Image – The first Australian cricket team to tour England, 1868. Aldo Massola Collection, AIATSIS.**

Is it really coincidence that mainstream Australian culture, film, art literature, flowered at the same time Australians began to recognise Aboriginal people as part of Australia, and to break down the silly racist lie of White Australia?

Think about the way Aboriginal symbols have been used to identify Australia, the boomerang being the most obvious example, as in the Sydney 2000 logo. Many people call this cultural appropriation – and some of it is. But appropriation can also be seen as cultural homage - no one takes something unless they see it as of value. And it can be seen as white Australians recognising that Australia is Aboriginal, and trying to belong to the land.

These are some examples of how all Australians have a shared heritage, and how we can focus on what unites us. This is critical if we are to reach the kind of consensus that is fundamental not only to Reconciliation, but also to a shared citizenship where beliefs and values, rights and obligations are recognised and shared.

### **Reconciliation is about partnerships**

Much of achieving Reconciliation depends on partnerships between Indigenous and other Australian agencies and individuals at sectoral, local and national levels to change systems and mindsets. There are hundreds of such initiatives across the country. These three I think show what can be done:

- **Teaching the Teachers**

A partnership of the University of New South Wales and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) developed resources to empower all teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies to all students.

- **Camilla Cowley and Gunggari people**

In south-west Queensland Camilla Cowley and her family and the local Gunggari people sat down and negotiated a land-use agreement which must be signed also by any purchaser of the property in the future.

- **Joint Management of Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park**

The key to the success of Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park is the cooperation between the traditional owners and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, sharing knowledge and expertise in managing their shared environment.

Finally, I want to suggest how Aboriginal ways of relating can help all Australians to develop a shared and inclusive citizenship. Aboriginal world views are about community, identity and belonging.

First and foremost, the Aboriginal idea of belonging to the land and being responsible for country is critical. More than anything else it is the land that has divided us in the past and should unite us now. More Australians are learning to love and to respect the land, rather than seeing it as a quarry, beginning to get used to the idea that individuals do not own land but are custodians for all people. And Aboriginal people can teach other Australians how to look after this country.

The second philosophical contribution is the local identity of Aboriginal people. This relates to the idea of belonging not just to the land in general, but to a particular place, or 'country' as we call it. This belonging grows a sense of community and common goals. This local identity can be an antidote to the globalism, which tends to deny all group identity, to make people feel powerless and encourage them to focus on self.

Our sense of community, based on belonging to the land, but also on the multiple and complex relationships of our extended families, with their reciprocal rights and obligations, may be a corrective to the individualism and selfishness of much mainstream Australian life now. It is this wider sense of family belonging that has been lost in much modern life, especially in the cities where most Australians live. This is something we can teach

other Australians. As the Aboriginal mother says in 'Bringing them home', the video of the Stolen Generations inquiry, "We're family people. We're family people."

### **Documents for Reconciliation**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May this year at the Sydney Opera House, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launched the draft Document for Reconciliation, a Declaration and four National Strategies for Reconciliation. There is a community consultation period until November this year, then the amended documents are to be presented to the nation again at the Opera House in May 2000. They then go to Parliament for ratification in November 2000.

The National Strategies are:

- A National Strategy for Economic Independence;
- A National Strategy to Address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disadvantage;
- A National Strategy to Promote Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights; and
- A National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process.

This is the Draft Declaration followed by the four National Strategies:

### **Draft Declaration for Reconciliation [To be shown as OHP]**

Speaking with one voice, we the people of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together recognising the gift of one another's presence.

We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of traditional lands and waters.

We respect and recognise continuing customary laws, beliefs, and traditions.

And through the land and its first peoples, we may taste this spirituality and rejoice in its grandeur.

We acknowledge this land was colonised without the consent of its original inhabitants.

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

And so we take this step: as one part of the nation expresses its sorrow and profoundly regrets the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apology and forgives.

Our new journey then begins. We must learn our shared history, walk together and grow together to enrich our understanding.

We desire a future where all Australians enjoy equal rights and share opportunities and responsibilities according to their aspirations.

And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, redress disadvantage and respect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine their own destinies.

Therefore, we stand proud as a united Australia that respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all.

These then are the four National Strategies for Reconciliation:

- A National Strategy for Economic Independence;
- A National Strategy to Address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disadvantage;
- A National Strategy to Promote Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights; and
- A National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process.

The Declaration asks us to formulate a collective national view of what it is to be Australian. It is about defining ourselves, who we are as a nation.

The National Strategies encourage us to think about how the daily lives of Indigenous Australians can be changed to achieve social justice and how this can change the life of the nation.

We need to look at the National Strategies in the full light of the knowledge that the formal process of Reconciliation finishes at the end of the year 2000. This then is our one chance to get it right.

The National Strategies are about setting in place a framework to guarantee Indigenous rights and set social justice in concrete for the future. Indigenous rights need to be protected in the constitution. The strategies need to translate into a legal base to transform the way governments at all levels do business with Indigenous people and what happens on the ground in terms of social justice outcomes for Indigenous people in this country. To provide any real guarantee of this happening there needs to be a legislative framework.

What I have just shown you is the blueprint for a united Australia. This is the challenge, but also the opportunity for all Australians. As we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Australian citizenship and face both a new millennium and the centenary of Australia as a nation-state, we are still at the crossroads of decision. This is the crunch time for decision on what is Australia.

As I said, there are levels of responsibility – national, State and Territory and local government, and the various sectors, agencies and organisations, and the individual level of responsibility. Governments, sectors, agencies and organisations have roles to play, but there are limits to what they can or will do without commitment by us the people. In the end it is up to the people, it is about us. And the bottom line is, how do we in the present want to be remembered? What is to be our legacy? What will be the Australian story of this decade of Reconciliation in the year 2099?

Reconciliation is up to us.

Thank you.

## **National Strategies to Advance Reconciliation** **[To be shown as OHP]**

The following National Strategies to Advance Reconciliation are based on Council's Draft Declaration for Reconciliation. The developed strategies will map out the steps we must take as we work together towards a reconciled nation. By supporting these strategies, governments, businesses, organisations and individuals from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community can make practical commitments to reconciliation. Partnerships between all sectors of our community are the best way to ensure that the Draft Declaration for Reconciliation becomes a reality in people's lives.

A National Strategy for Economic Independence will facilitate greater economic independence and self-reliance in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It seeks to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and promote their human dignity. This strategy recognises that economic empowerment will not occur through welfare programs. The strategy will achieve its greatest success when it is built on partnerships between all sectors. This strategy would include:

- Better access to capital, business planning advice and assistance;
- Increased networking and mentoring opportunities;
- Better access to training and development opportunities;
- Promotion and encouragement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander small business;
- Greater strategic and integrated regional economic development plans;
- Fostering partnerships with the business community; and
- Reform of current government economic and funding programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A National Strategy to Address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disadvantage aims for better outcomes in health, education, employment, housing, law and justice. Its objective is to achieve social and economic conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which are the same as those enjoyed by other Australians. This strategy will get better outcomes from government and non-government services. It builds on the National Strategy for Economic Independence.

Reconciliation requires practical and real steps to target the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a result of

past injustices. Statistics show that they are the poorest, unhealthiest, least employed, worst housed and most imprisoned Australians.

This strategy will be based on partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, governments, the business sector and service organisations. It will set out mechanisms to measure progress and report publicly.

A National Strategy to Promote Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights will be based on the principles that all Australians should share equal rights and responsibilities as citizens; should be able to participate, as they choose, in all levels of decision-making on matters which affect them and their communities; and should enjoy equal social and economic conditions, according to their aspirations.

This strategy will recognise the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original custodians of Australia, their continuing cultures and heritage, and their rights under the common law. It will recognise the unique relationships of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters and the importance of traditional land management knowledge in sustaining the natural environment. The strategy will also recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing aspirations for greater recognition and self-determination within the framework of the Australian Constitution, and will propose strategies for increased representation in Australian parliaments.

A National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process will build on the existing people's movement for reconciliation. It will promote knowledge and understanding of the history of Australia's colonisation and will assist Australia to celebrate the diversity of the origin of its peoples. It will acknowledge the cultural, social and economic contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the nation. The strategy will describe how governments at all levels, organisations and community groups can recognise and adopt appropriate protocols, as well as establish symbols of reconciliation that reflect our shared history and culture.

The strategy will propose the establishment of a reconciliation foundation to provide leadership for reconciliation, monitor progress, and support the many groups which currently contribute to reconciliation process, including State and Territory Reconciliation Committees and local reconciliation groups. The strategy will also seek recognition and protection of the Declaration of Reconciliation in the Constitutions of the Commonwealth, States and Territories.

