

# ReconciliationNews

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Adam Goodes

**2014 Australian of  
the Year on NRW**

Noel Pearson

**time to complete  
our Constitution**

The Hon Fred Chaney AO

**recollections of a  
quiet achiever**



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**Caution: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this publication may contain the images of deceased people.**

Reconciliation Australia  
Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace, Parkes ACT 2600  
PO Box 4773, Kingston ACT 2604  
Ph: (02) 6273 9200  
Fax: (02) 6273 9201  
[www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)

As the national organisation building relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians, Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit, non-government organisation. Your active contribution and financial support helps us develop innovative programs and resources.

This magazine is compiled by Reconciliation Australia to share reconciliation stories, issues and opinions. Feedback and story ideas are always welcome along with names and addresses of people who would like to receive the newsletter. Please email us at: [enquiries@reconciliation.org.au](mailto:enquiries@reconciliation.org.au)

**Cover image: Adam Goodes, 2014 Australian of the Year (Image courtesy of the National Australia Day Council)**



**Reconciliation  
AUSTRALIA**

# CEO's message

**This edition of *Reconciliation News* coincides with National Reconciliation Week, always a high point on our calendar thanks to the widespread support it now attracts all around Australia. The goodwill and positive energy generated by NRW is clear evidence that true reconciliation is certainly within our grasp.**

Framed by two significant anniversaries—the 1967 referendum and the High Court's 1992 Mabo decision—NRW reminds us that great achievements take courage and persistence.

In a week chock full of activities, NRW offers all Australians the opportunity to join in and celebrate our diversity, our cultures and our relationships. This year's NRW theme, *Let's walk the talk*, is an open invitation to everyone to turn their good intentions into action especially in relation to the proposal to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

You can read Noel Pearson's persuasive argument in favour of constitutional change on page 16, and Senior Australian of the Year the Hon Fred Chaney AO also touches on this important topic in his wide-ranging interview on page eight.

I really enjoyed reading the thoughts of nine prominent reconciliation supporters on just what NRW means to them, as I'm sure you will. One of last year's NRW Ambassadors, Meshel Laurie says her firm belief is that 'friendship is the key to real and meaningful reconciliation' while another NRW Ambassador, Troy Cassar-Daley, says that 'we must put as much effort as we can into education'.

We have also included an extended excerpt from the maiden speech of Senator Nova Peris, the first Aboriginal woman in the Australian Parliament. If her past sporting achievements are anything to go by, she will be a passionate and determined representative for the Northern Territory and we wish her well.

Possible changes to the Racial Discrimination Act has been a focus for us over the last couple of months. The argument against change by the Reconciliation Australia Board of Directors is outlined on page 19. This is an issue that we all need to speak out against at every opportunity.

Featured on our cover is Australian of the Year, Adam Goodes, whose legendary courage and commitment on the football field is equally evident in his forthright comments against racism. We congratulate both Adam and our Board director the Hon Fred Chaney AO on their well-deserved Australian of the Year awards.

The report by our Recognise team on their journey around Australia brings you up to date with their ongoing travels which have encouraged many new supporters to come on board. If you're keen to *walk the talk*—you can do that immediately by signing up as a supporter through the Recognise website.

I am delighted that NRW has become such an important focus for reconciliation and I encourage everyone to walk the talk and be part of this significant week.

**Leah Armstrong,**  
CEO Reconciliation Australia







# NRW: a special week

Neat dance moves at the launch of NRW in Cairns last year. (image by Leigh Harris)

**While the start of winter always falls during National Reconciliation Week, there's no denying the warmth of the celebrations. NRW is a time when all Australians have an open invitation to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements and to become involved in the national reconciliation movement.**

Back when it began in 1993, NRW was known as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation and was supported by Australia's major religious groups. Under the guidance of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (now Reconciliation Australia), it has evolved into the all-embracing celebration that it is today.

The two dates that bookend the week, 27 May and 3 June, recall significant milestones in the reconciliation journey—the 1967 referendum and the High Court's Mabo decision in 1992.

The 1967 referendum was a defining event in our history. It remains Australia's most successful referendum with more than 90 per cent of Australians voting in favour of the proposition to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the national

census and to give the Commonwealth the power to make laws for them.

The stunning result was achieved after a concerted 10-year campaign involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who tirelessly marched, lobbied, published, promoted and debated in support of the Yes case. And Australians overwhelmingly agreed it was a wrong that needed to be corrected.

The landmark Mabo decision was another major turning point for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The highest court in the land confirmed the legal right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the land they had occupied prior to colonisation. This legal recognition paved the way for Native Title land rights.

Our NRW theme this year is *Let's Walk the Talk*—an invitation to all Australians to turn

their good intentions into action, especially supporting the campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our Constitution.

Ways you might become involved include holding an event at your school, office, community centre or in a nearby park. Perhaps invite a local elder to speak at your event about the history of the First Australians in your local area. Maybe screen a film for your staff or class like *The Sapphires*, *Bran Nue Dae* or *Ten Canoes*. We have a list of good ideas on our website [www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw) which is where you should also register your event.

Enjoy National Reconciliation Week. It's an occasion to marvel on just how far we have come and the perfect time to imagine what is possible as we look ahead!

# NRW ticks all the boxes

To highlight National Reconciliation Week, we asked some of our dedicated reconciliation supporters to tell us why they think NRW is such an important annual event. It's been inspiring to read their words and to see just what it means to them.

Because it stretches over a week, there are abundant opportunities to attend some of the associated activities. Last year more than 700 separate NRW events were registered and we're expecting to see just as many again this year.

Here are the personal observations of some of our reconciliation true believers.

## Adam Goodes

### 2014 Australian of the Year

While National Reconciliation Week is an important event for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it's equally relevant to non-Indigenous Australians. Because we're all in this together. Of course, reconciliation is not confined to a single week, it's a gradual ongoing process, but NRW gives us all a chance to reflect on where we're at. On the eve of NRW 2014, there's no doubt things are better now than they were 20 or 30 years ago. That's not to say all is rosy and bright, because we still have a fair distance to travel on the reconciliation journey. But the signs are good.

For me, the footy season is always in full swing when NRW comes around so I seldom have much free time. And this year in my role as Australian of the Year I have even less! But I notice we have a big Thursday night home game against the Cats during

NRW so I'm hoping I might be able to get along to a couple of events on the weekend.

However you choose to celebrate the week, I hope it gives you joy and inspiration.

## Meshel Laurie

### Comedian, TV and radio personality

National Reconciliation Week last year was such a joy for me, mostly because of the opportunities it gave me to engage with Indigenous people and culture.

My firm belief is that friendship is the key to real and meaningful reconciliation. It was my close childhood friendships with Indigenous children that created an abiding love in me for them, their families and their culture.

Those relationships gave me respect and curiosity, and made it impossible for me to ever fall victim to silly rumours and racism.

Social media makes it easier than ever before for Indigenous and non-Indigenous

Australians to connect, to communicate directly, to ask questions and to learn about each other—to become friends. All it requires is that little bit of encouragement for people to take a chance and have a go. I reckon National Reconciliation Week provides that encouragement.

## Troy Cassar-Daley

### Legendary country singer

Reconciliation to me is an extension of what my family back in Grafton learned from our grandparents. My Nan and Pop were hard working Indigenous Australians who taught us that colour should never be a barrier ... a common saying my Nan had was 'see a job big or small, do it right or not at all'. This has been the basis on which my career and life have been built.

My Pop worked alongside non-Indigenous men on the NSW Railways who respected

Adam Goodes



Meshel Laurie



Troy Cassar-Daley





him for his work ethic and did not judge him for the colour of his skin.

In order to move forward with reconciliation in this country we must put as much effort as we can into education. Education for our young generation to give them the keys to the door for a brighter future, and education of broader non-Indigenous Australia about us as a people and our culture to take away the fear factor that is brought about by a lack of understanding. I hope to continue to build bridges with my music as much as Deb Mailman does with her acting and Greg Inglis does with his football career.

This won't happen overnight but I know the majority of Australia would like to walk forward in the same direction on a positive open road together.

## Jennifer Westacott

**Chief Executive, Business Council of Australia**

During last year's NRW, the BCA held a morning tea for staff and invited our young Aboriginal intern to speak about her life and family, and what reconciliation meant for them.

What really stuck for me was a comment she made about how the interest we showed in her culture contributed to her pride and confidence and her wish to learn more about her own background.

It reinforced my sense of what businesses can do and are doing to foster reconciliation through mutually beneficial engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Every year, our member survey shows how businesses represented in the BCA are starting to make a real difference, through supporting economic development but also through building relationships and understanding between Indigenous and other Australians.

This is a leadership responsibility that should be very straightforward for our members, and they want us to be constantly encouraging and supporting them to go further.

## Richard Freudenstein

**Chief Executive Officer, Foxtel**

As a member of the RAP community, Foxtel is committed to engaging all Australians in National Reconciliation Week this year.

I'm proud we're able to leverage Foxtel's talents to support the theme of *Let's walk the talk* by providing community service announcement airtime to Reconciliation Australia and raising awareness of our employees through internal events and communications.

National Reconciliation Week is important for us all because it brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians together to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success and reconciliation.

And we're walking the talk with Reconciliation Australia and the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) by producing our third *Who We Are* television series targeting Australian school students, which will be released later this year.

Reconciliation is such an important part of the Australian agenda and we will continue to ensure it is a priority now, and in the years ahead.

## Alison Page

**Executive Officer, Saltwater Freshwater and designer**

The latest census data tells us that over half of our mob are 24 years or younger so this year, as another National Reconciliation Week rolls around, I want to talk to all those young people about the historical significance of NRW, which commemorates two watershed moments in our nation's history.

May 27 will mark the anniversary of the 1967 referendum, which saw over 90 per cent of Australians vote to give the Commonwealth the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and count them in the national census. My dad was 25 in 1967 and so had spent his whole youth invisible to the country that his own father served in war to protect.

That referendum changed my father's life and it changed mine too—even though I wasn't even born. It was a turning point in this nation's history. Now 47 years later we have another opportunity to take another leap forward by recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our Constitution. We have the chance to give positive recognition to the contribution of the world's oldest living culture to our national identity.

Jennifer Westacott



Richard Freudenstein



Alison Page



On 3 June 1992, the High Court of Australia delivered its landmark Mabo decision recognising our continued connection to the land. As significant as the native title legislation is, it will not and cannot be of benefit to all our people simply because most of us have been dispossessed and have been unable to maintain the continued association to land upon which proof of native title depends.

For this reason, under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act, a Land Account was established as part of the 'grand bargain' to facilitate the acquisition of land for our communities who would not otherwise be able to access land through the formal native title process.

As a young Aboriginal woman, I am proud to sit as a Director on the Indigenous Land Corporation, whose job it is to honour the original intention of the 'grand bargain' and assist communities to acquire and manage land, which will achieve economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits for generations to come.

Happy NRW!

## Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion

Minister for Indigenous Affairs

It is now six years since the historic day in 2008 when the Apology, in a show of bipartisan support, passed Parliament. I have to confess that initially I was not convinced that it would translate into something meaningful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. My main worry

was that the Apology might turn out to be nothing more than a word; an empty gesture.

I was wrong. I came to see first-hand the profound and positive effect the Apology had on my close friends and I was left in no doubt that this was a highly transformative experience that gave Indigenous people permission to grieve and commence the journey forward; together with all Australians. It represented to me the meaning of true reconciliation.

These things may be symbolic but they have real meaning for people. I have not looked back and I will be throwing my efforts behind our First Australians being recognised in the Constitution because it will signal unity for our nation and is another major milestone towards healing for all Australians.

## Andrea Mason

Coordinator, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, winner of the 2012 Indigenous Governance Award

For me, reconciliation sits in the space around opportunities that individuals take on to build a reconciled Australia. The broad impact resulting from opportunities taken to advance reconciliation may not always be obvious at the beginning of the journey. However it has been my experience that saying yes when such chances are offered can lead to extraordinary friendships and unique life changing experiences.

So when I reflect on the importance of National Reconciliation Week in Australia, I see it as an amazing opportunity for

individuals, organisations and communities to take action to becoming a reconciled nation.

In the main meeting room at NPY Women's Council in Alice Springs hangs a print that was commissioned to commemorate the handing back of Uluru in 1995. The print contains some powerful words: Nyuntu Anangu Maruka Ngurangka Ngaranyi. In English the translation is ... you are on Aboriginal land.

NRW helps me to reflect on the truth of this statement and also to reflect on areas where more opportunities and relationships may need to be developed and how I can facilitate this through my commitment to a reconciled Australia.

## John Danalis

Teacher and children's author

I love the theme of this year's NRW; it's a real challenge to us all to get off our backsides and not take reconciliation for granted. I'll be 'walking the talk' at a local event with my kids on the Northside of Brisbane, as well as getting along to the State Library of Queensland on the 27th to listen to a conversation on the evolution of storytelling in Indigenous Australia.

I believe story is the great change-maker in the world—it's like fire—and our storytellers are the keepers of the flame. During the week I'll be connecting with friends from the Tiwi Islands, down to the Murray River, doing a little quiet reflection, and hopefully having a few big belly laughs too.

Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion



Andrea Mason



John Danalis

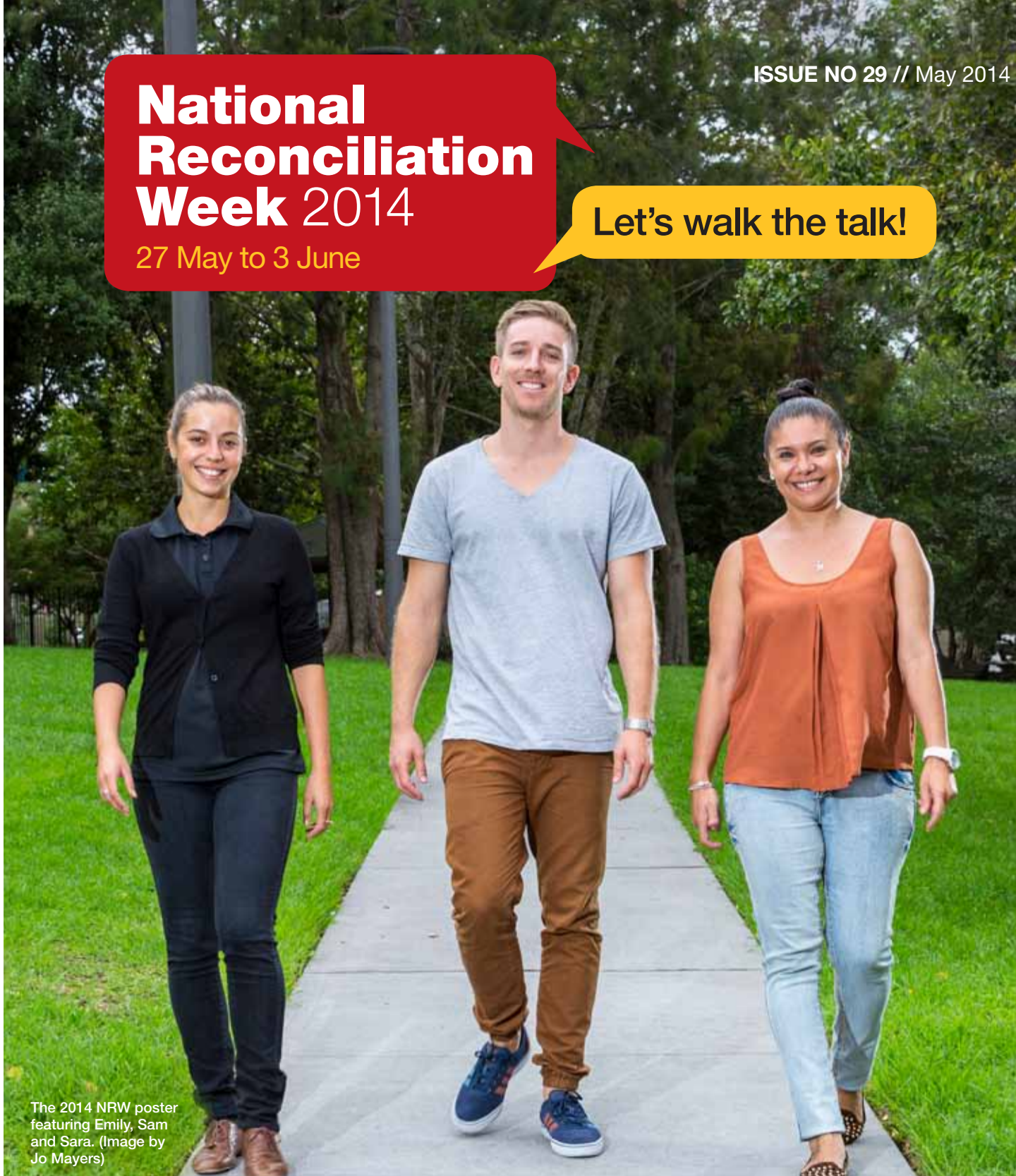




# National Reconciliation Week 2014

27 May to 3 June

Let's walk the talk!



The 2014 NRW poster featuring Emily, Sam and Sara. (Image by Jo Mayers)

## How and why a poster?

One of the important elements in promoting National Reconciliation Week has always been the poster, which drives the look and feel of the campaign.

Now some might say that in these techno times of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, perhaps posters are yesterday's marketing medium. It's a fair enough point of view. But because lots of people have a stake in NRW and are keen to help promote it, the poster

is an easy and practical way to spread the word. That's why you'll see it on office walls, in community centres, shopping malls, public billboards and even on people's fridges!

Because reconciliation is vital for Australia's future wellbeing, we decided to use young people to depict the way forward. Our good friends at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) in Sydney found the 'talent' — Emily Schnierer, of Torres Strait and Hungarian heritage, Sam Refshauge, of English and Danish heritage and Sara Hamilton, a proud Gamilaroi woman.


These days taking a photo is a fairly straightforward task but to get the right

composition, with faces in focus, everyone smiling and no-one blinking usually takes a bit of time. Aboriginal photographer Jo Mayers did a great job, even setting up lights in the park just to lift the contrast.

The three young people in the photo personify the positive vibe of National Reconciliation Week which is all about bringing people together and celebrating our diversity as a nation. Our thanks go to Emily, Sam and Sara for their time, to Nancia Guivarra from the NCIE for coordinating the talent, to Luke Briscoe for his kind assistance on the day and of course to Jo for capturing the moment.



# Recollections of a quiet achiever

A photograph of Fred Chaney, an older man with white hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit and a blue striped shirt. He is smiling and holding a large, blue, curved trophy. The background is a blurred white building with columns.

Fred Chaney's long history of working to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples stems from his firm commitment to social justice and a belief in the inherent equality of people. Formerly a lawyer, Fred served as a Liberal Senator for Western Australia from 1974 to 1990 and as the Member for Pearce from 1990 until 1993. His ministerial appointments included two years as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.



After leaving Parliament, Fred was Chancellor of Murdoch University for eight years and was the founding Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia and continues as a Director on the Board. He established the *Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia* and for many years was Deputy President of the *National Native Title Tribunal*. He was instrumental in establishing the *Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation*, which supports Indigenous young people to reach their potential and is currently Chair of *Desert Knowledge Australia*. In January he was named Senior Australian of the Year for 2014. Fred recently spoke to us about his long involvement in the reconciliation movement.

**Your advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and your passion for social justice has been a life-long crusade that continues today. What was it that first ignited that passion and why did you dedicate yourself to the cause?**

Ideas about right and wrong were implanted in me before I met my first Aboriginal person when I was 14. I was uncomfortable with what I saw then about relationships and respect through the window of that first encounter. It did not seem right to me and roused my interest and curiosity. What I learned about and saw as a student at university confirmed that treatment of Aboriginal people did not conform to the normal Australian principles of mateship and the fair go. Visiting Aboriginal reserves in the south-west of Western Australia, seeing people who did not have the right to vote and were not even counted as Australians, as well as witnessing overt acts of racism, were all part of convincing me that this was the most significant aspect of Australian life that had to be changed.

**Before you entered Parliament you were very active in the campaign leading to the 1967 referendum. In what ways did working closely with Aboriginal people on that landmark event shape your commitment to reconciliation?**

In the 1967 campaign as in many others during my lifetime I was a foot soldier rather than a general. My earlier involvement in the voting rights campaign in 1961 through the University Liberal Club was an early lesson that you need to work with other people to achieve change. The voting rights campaign involved citizens working with Indigenous people and supporting politicians across party lines working for change. The 1967 referendum was brilliantly led by Aboriginal and Islander people. People like me, active in politics, were part of the network of support. Again there were powerful lessons. In that case Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders built a coalition of support across the political divide in Parliament and in the community that carried the day.

As university students we did work closely with Aboriginal people and subsequently my work as a lawyer brought me into contact with Aboriginal people as clients. But the

opportunity to work in partnership with Aboriginal people as against supporting their cause really followed the referendum when people really did work together to establish legal and other services. The idea that we needed to work together on these issues was so obvious that the idea of reconciliation was obvious too.

Another lesson I draw from this history is that the issues should not be party politicised. Of course they are political issues but they are not and should not be party issues. The record shows that both sides of politics have taken important steps in righting historic wrongs. Cross-party and community support should be the aim.

**You served in the Federal Parliament for 20 years including several years as the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. It's always been a complex portfolio and so I wonder what lessons you learned and what advice you might have for the current minister, Nigel Scullion, on how to be successful in the role?**

As I said to Nigel Scullion recently it's probably irritating to have a minister from 35 years ago working in your patch. There have been a lot of Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs since me and we should all be modest in offering current Ministers advice. My heavy personal involvement in reconciliation, education, protection of native title and delivering social economic and cultural benefits from native title will continue. Beyond that there are well known lessons from the last four decades about what works and the vital need to structure government delivery platforms in ways which actually work. That means a high degree of bottom up (i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) involvement in program design and delivery, something successive administrations have found difficult to achieve.

The good intentions of the present Government are apparent and they, like all governments, have a real challenge in achieving results equal to their ambitions. The capacity to work *with* Indigenous people rather than *on* Indigenous people has to be developed in the bureaucracy if the Prime Minister's laudable ambitions are to be realised.

**The High Court's Mabo decision in 1992 and the Apology in 2008 were significant events for different reasons. Mabo was about justice and precipitated real changes to Aboriginal land rights, while the Apology was about acknowledgement and healing. What do you remember of those two events and how did they change Australia?**

The Mabo decision was in my view the most important turning point for Indigenous people since white settlement. Recognition in the Common Law of rights flowing from Indigenous law and custom resulted in a significant shift in the balance of power and has enabled Indigenous people to come to the table as legally recognised stakeholders rather than as mendicants. Of course the outcomes are uneven, there has been a lot of extinguishment of native title since settlement. But even where native title has been held not to be present as the Courts found for the magnificent Yorta Yorta people, they have still been able to come to the table as a people requiring recognition. And I remember about the Mabo decision on a personal level as a moment of exhilaration and a moment of celebration.

The Apology was really important to a large number of Indigenous people and families who had been directly or indirectly affected by child removal policies. Its impact was heightened by the reluctance of the previous government to use the word that those affected wanted to hear. That the Apology now has been embraced by the present government as well as the last is a sign of our maturing as a nation and as a society. Again, the Apology was a moment to be celebrated.

**As well as being a long serving director of Reconciliation Australia, you are the Chair of Desert Knowledge and what projects and programs does the organisation undertake?**

Desert Knowledge Australia is a statutory corporation of the Northern Territory which seeks to enhance the circumstances and sustainability of all desert communities across desert Australia. It is intercultural in its approach believing we will have a shared future. It has worked on intercultural

leadership, small business development and, most significantly from my personal perspective, on how to structure government in remote Australia so that it works for all the people who live in that vast area.

**Over the years, you have no doubt met many influential people from all walks of life. Who have been some of the most inspiring and why?**

One of the many good fortunes in my life has been to work with inspiring people who provided me with moral and intellectual leadership. The three High Court judges who have come from Western Australia are good examples. Ron Wilson taught me at Law School, as Solicitor-General supported us when we were setting up the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) in Western Australia, and after leaving the High Court, led on the issues relating to the stolen generations.

John Toohey also taught me at Law School and was the first lawyer we employed in the ALS in the North-West and has been a consistent friend and mentor over 50 years. The current Chief Justice, Robert French, who is much younger than I am, was an inspiring student leader instrumental in establishing the Aboriginal Legal Service in Western Australia. He and I worked closely together in the Liberal Party subsequently and much later I served under him in the National Native Title Tribunal. Oddly enough for an ordinary lawyer like me I have had the opportunity to work with the best of lawyers who have used their skills for the betterment of society generally and for Indigenous people specifically.

Hal Wootten QC and Ron Castan QC are other inspiring figures in my life whose beautiful minds informed mine. In politics I am deeply grateful the leadership Malcolm Fraser always showed on racial matters. From my first associations with him in 1975 I never knew him to deviate from his clearly expressed view to our Party Room that he would have no truck with a policy which suggested one person was better than another because of skin colour.

I've also been inspired by public servants who I have worked with, some of whom are my workmates still 35 years later. Tony Ayers, Bill Gray, Neil Westbury (first CEO of Reconciliation Australia), Mike Dillon and Peter Shergold are just a few of the principled people I have been honoured to work with.

This could be a very long list indeed because I have predominantly worked with people I admire. My advice to younger players is to work with the best people you can find, the people you most admire, because they will make you better than you are.

**As Senior Australian of the Year for 2014, you have the rare opportunity to garner media attention, speak publicly and lobby governments and business. What will be your messages and what do you hope to achieve during your tenure?**

This honour has been given to me in a year which was already crammed with activities. It does provide some additional public opportunities but my real priority is to continue to do everything I can to ensure that the massive goodwill in the community and in the Government is translated into real results for Indigenous Australians. I believe it is essential to remain involved in on the ground activities to remain relevant to the debate.

My key message is to do things *with* Indigenous people not *to* them. We have to allow the time to engage not impose unrealistic government timetables which preclude Indigenous participation and result in the same old 'boss man telling you what to do' failures. The Reconciliation Australia message that respectful relationships are essential to underpin change is in conformity with my experience over the last 50 years.

Constitutional recognition is an important step in the reconciliation journey which will require exceptional political, community, and Indigenous leadership to succeed. Once again I will be a foot soldier in what is a national endeavour this year.

By the end of this year we will know whether the Government has been able to structure itself to work effectively with Indigenous people. I hope to contribute to that and will do everything I can to work with governments and the private sector to capitalise on the massive goodwill that exists in 2014.

**There is bipartisan support for the recognition of the First Australians in the Constitution and the Prime Minister has personally pledged his support. But only 8 of 44 referenda have been successful and two of those were more than 100 years ago. Given that the 1967 referendum campaign ran**

**for 10 years, are we rushing the process or do you think it is achievable in the life of the current parliament?**

There are two conditions precedent for the Australian community to embrace a constitutional amendment for Indigenous recognition. The first is to find a proposal which will satisfy what I would call the constitutionalists, people whose primary concern is with the structure of government in Australia rather than issues of race. Second, to find a proposal which is acceptable to the great majority of Indigenous people, some of whom are primarily concerned with issues of treaty and sovereignty.

To succeed, any proposal must bridge those two constituencies. If we can avoid any substantial minority opposition to a proposal, a referendum during the current Parliament could succeed. As the Expert Panel found there is a widespread view that a failed referendum would be a backward step. We should have the referendum therefore when we have the right proposal and the right level of support from the Australian people including, of course, the Indigenous people.

**When you were announced as Senior Australian of the Year, you mentioned in your speech that this was the 'most hopeful time' of your life. What did you mean by that?**

When I first started taking an interest in the 1950s I think Indigenous people looking around could have concluded that every hand was against them. In 2014, with 500 plus Reconciliation Action Plans and more on the way, cross-party support for constitutional recognition, the Prime Minister designating himself as Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, cross-party support for closing the gap, and a vast number of community-based initiatives around working with Indigenous people, it is a very different scene.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to improve our relationships and to improve the social and economic circumstances of Indigenous Australians. Australia 2014 is a foreign country compared with Australia 1960. There are allies rather than enemies everywhere. I am realistic about the fact that we could waste this opportunity, but with good leadership, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and a real acceptance of the critical role Indigenous people themselves have in making change happen, I do feel justified in calling this era the most hopeful in my lifetime.





## Delta and Gurrumul on board for *Sing Loud!*

Delta Goodrem and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu perform on *The Voice* during National Reconciliation Week 2013. (Image courtesy of Shine Australia)

**Tired of singing the same old tunes? Looking for a new vocal challenge? Keen to sing songs that also have a powerful reconciliation message? Then *Sing Loud!* a song competition devised by Reconciliation Australia for National Reconciliation Week, has the answer. *Sing Loud!* is all about singing and performing, and creates an opportunity for community, church and school choirs to share the spirit of reconciliation during NRW.**

There's \$2000 in prize money on offer for the best cover and best original song and the big news is that your entries will be judged by Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Delta Goodrem.

Delta and Gurrumul were obvious choices as judges for *Sing Loud!* following their stunning duet, *Bayini*, sung in Yolngu Matha on *The Voice* during NRW last year.

Director of Skinnyfish Music, Michael Hohnen, said Gurrumul had told him: "Delta is a letchen (beautiful), powerful singer and she learned a lot of language (for our song together), much more than we asked. This was the biggest sign of reconciliation that someone could show to an Indigenous person—to go more than halfway."

Reconciliation Australia project manager Elle Shepherd said the competition gives

everyone a chance to *walk the talk* in line with this year's NRW theme. "We're looking for heartfelt songs about the hope of one day waking to a reconciled, just and equitable Australia," she said.

"We want to see these songs performed during NRW, recorded and uploaded to the *Sing Loud!* webpage to be a part of the competition."

There are two ways to get involved. Choose a song from the playlist on our website, download the sheet music, chord charts and lyrics and create your own version. If you think you can do better than our playlist, get creative and write a song of your own.

One of the playlist songs, *Let's Recognise*, was written by Kerry Fletcher of *Sorry Song* fame. Other songs include *The Journey* which was written and recorded by the

staff of Reconciliation Australia and *Time to Get Serious* by Robert Beattie. The Tutti Choir from Adelaide were quick off the mark and were first to upload a song—their performance of *Let's Recognise*, now on the website for all to hear.

Don't forget to register your performance as an NRW event and post the recording or video on our website.

During NRW, Reconciliation Australia would love to see (and hear) choirs all around Australia performing reconciliation songs. If you have any questions, please email [enquiries@reconciliation.org.au](mailto:enquiries@reconciliation.org.au) or call 02 6273 9200.

Funding for *Sing Loud!* has been provided by Woodside Australia, a company dedicated to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



A portrait of Senator Nova Peris, an Indigenous Australian woman, smiling and standing outdoors. She is wearing a black blazer over a bright pink top with a black and white patterned vertical stripe down the center. She has her hair in a braid and is wearing a necklace with a small pendant. Two pins are visible on her blazer. The background is a blurred natural setting with trees.

# Still dreaming the dream

Nova Peris was elected as a Senator for the Northern Territory in the 2013 Federal election, the first Indigenous woman in the Australian Parliament. She is an Olympian in two sports, hockey and athletics, and won an Olympic gold medal for hockey in the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. She also won gold medals for the 200 metres and the 4x100 metres relay at the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur.



**Nova was named Young Australian of the Year in 1997 and was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the same year. This is an extract from her maiden speech in Parliament delivered in November 2013. The full speech can be accessed through her parliamentary website.**

*I am Nova Maree Peris. I was born in Darwin in the Northern Territory and I retain my strong cultural and spiritual ties to my country, to Mother Earth. I am a member of the oldest continuous living culture on the earth. I am proud that this hill that we meet on here today is culturally significant to the Ngambri people as representing the womb of the 'Woman' on this Country.*

*It is very significant to me to be the first Aboriginal woman elected to the Federal Parliament of Australia. Through my mother, I am a descendant of the Gija people of the East Kimberley and the Yawuru people of the West Kimberley. I am also Iwatja from Western Arnhem Land through my father.*

*Aboriginal Australians are symbolic of triumph over adversity. We represent knowledge and wisdom held in land and country, because in our hearts we know that we do not own Mother Earth; the Earth owns us.*

*As a child growing up, I dreamt big. Most people would have looked at an Aboriginal girl from the Territory, where the statistics of alcohol abuse, youth suicide, domestic violence, imprisonment rates and substandard education point to every reason why I should not succeed. But I was determined to be successful. And yes, I am a product of that history, and I continue to live in a society whereby the odds are stacked against Aboriginal people.*

*I have always been inspired by those around me, and my sister, Venessa Peris, has undertaken an incredible journey of her own. She has lived an amazing and accomplished life serving Australia. She was a corporal and served for 10 years in the Australian Army. And last month she completed 10 years with United Nations Peacekeeping operations. Venessa served for seven years in the Ivory Coast and survived a West African civil war, and at one stage was involved in evacuating more than 4,000 people. She is currently carrying out her duties and resides in Monrovia, Liberia.*

*I say this to all of my Indigenous brothers and sisters and to all people: within every one of us lies the ability to reach deep inside ourselves and draw upon our inherited*

*strength that our ancestors have given us. There lies a spirit that needs to be awakened.*

*Whilst I am obviously very proud of my Aboriginal heritage I want to make it clear that I do not consider myself an expert when it comes to finding solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's particular predicaments. For too long we have all heard too many people say they have the answers for Aboriginal Australians and claim the moral high ground. If the answers were as easily provided as the questions are posed, we simply would not have a problem. In fact the answers are difficult and complex; but they do not lie in absolute positions and simplified slogans. Just delivering another government program will not end the appalling rates of youth suicide in our communities, for example. These are uncomfortable issues but they must be confronted.*

**“Our beliefs sustain our spirits, they nourish us; but at some levels they can restrain us too—that is the collision point that confronts Aboriginal people.”**

*Like many before me, for too long, I have watched Aboriginal Australians and our plight be used purely for political purposes. I have seen some totally unscrupulous people try to use the misery of some of our people's circumstances to promote their own cause and agenda. Should I see this happen, I will call it for what it is. It is racism—and I know that is confronting—but I will not stand by in silence. How we change things—that remains the challenge, but I know from my heart that nothing can be achieved without total determination and a gut-busting effort.*

*It is my dream to see kids from Santa Theresa, from Gunbalanya, from Kalkarindji and from the Tiwi Islands all with the same opportunity as the kids from the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. That is one of the reasons I am a fierce advocate for Aboriginal people being taught to be able to read and write English. We cannot and should not be denied these basic tools. Of course, we should never be forced to renounce our culture. Our beliefs sustain our spirits, they nourish us; but at some levels they can restrain us too—that is the collision point that confronts Aboriginal people.*

*I make the simple point that in spite of difficulties like those I have described we are seeing some positive health benefits through the dedication of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health professionals. We can make a difference, whatever our differences are.*

*The Northern Territory is currently the only jurisdiction in Australia that is on track to meet the Closing the Gap target on life expectancy. This improvement comes from people who have sought evidence and put that evidence into action. They have not acted on any fixed ideology but out of dedication and commitment. This evidence based method of approach is, in my view, a real road sign for the future and points the way to dealing with so many other areas of Aboriginal life that have seemed so intractable for so long. This is why I will be seeking to work not only with my colleagues in the Labor Party in holding the government to account but also with the current government to ensure we build on successes in primary health care—and to extend those successes into other areas of our lives.*

*Education remains the major foundation for self-improvement. And although education is a basic fundamental right of every child in this country, irrespective of their race, the fact remains we must work hard to convince people of the value of education.*

*I am a Territory girl. I am immensely proud of who I am and where I hail from. It is majestic. The Northern Territory's very talented musicians, our artists, our sports men and women, our culture, our iconic and diverse landscape that boasts a number of World Heritage listings—there is certainly is no other place I would rather call home.*

# On the road again: Journey to Recognition



The Journey to Recognition kicked off in Fremantle on March 10 led by Whadjuk Noongar elders. (Image by Roel Loopers courtesy of Recognise)

**The latest leg of the Journey to Recognition took in South West Western Australia, stopping in small towns and regional centres and building support along the way.**

**“It is our generation that has both the responsibility—and also the great privilege—to bring about an historic change that will forge a more unified future together”.**

These were the words that recognition campaigners, Jane Powles, Sonia Waters and Libby Collins left echoing over the hills and beaches of Esperance as the Journey to Recognition ended its Western leg.

In Albany, a 300-strong crowd gathered to walk up York Street Hill, united in their quest

to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples recognised in the Constitution, and see racial discrimination removed from our founding document.

Local Noongar man Lester Coyne welcomed campaigners to his country, encouraging locals to keep the conversation going

and reinforcing that this would require all Australians to work together.

It was indicative of the goodwill and unity that has been seen throughout communities in the South West.

With a throng of locals, the federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Senator Nigel



Scullion braved the wind and early morning to walk with the Journey in Esperance.

After a seven kilometre walk from Salmon Beach, he said: "It was great to once again be a part of the Journey to Recognition and to see so many members of the community in Esperance supporting this important movement."

"Our bloodlines are connected to the oldest continuing cultures on the planet. This remarkable and impressive story should be recognised in our founding document."

"A successful referendum would be a unifying moment for the nation. We all have a responsibility to get involved and support the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in our Constitution."

The journey through South West WA began a month earlier in Fremantle, when Elders from the Whadjuk Noongar community led locals in the first steps.

Whadjuk Noongar Elder, Cedric Jacobs had these powerful words to share: "I invite you on behalf of our Elders to walk with us, at our pace, in peace and unity, as it will align us with the soul and spirit of our land."

"For after all, this land's resources have been managed in a sustainable way by my ancestors for 50,000 years."

Young Noongar woman, Tiana Culbong, asked Fremantle to stand with her in supporting the movement: "It is now 2014. A time for change; a time to move forward as a nation united; a time to remove a constitutional silence; a time to recognise Aboriginal people and our history in this country."

And there had been further reinforcement of the cross-party support for recognition, with Labor MP Melissa Parke and Greens

Senators Christine Milne, Rachel Siewert and Scott Ludlam all there to restate their commitment.

Over another 20 days in the nation's south-west, the Journey made its way through tiny towns and regional centres, stopping in Roelands, Bunbury, Margaret River and Denmark.

In Yallingup, Traditional Owner Bill Webb took walkers through his country, sharing the remarkable history, culture and stories of the Wardandi people.

"Preserving our history and knowledge. That's what Aboriginal people are doing," he said.

In Busselton, Josh Whiteland honoured his connection to the Wardandi Bibbulman people, who have walked the South West Cape region and surrounding areas for over 50,000 years. "Our bloodlines are connected to the oldest continuing cultures on the planet. This remarkable and impressive story should be recognised in our founding document. It's about acknowledging the truth. Someone was and still is here," he said.

And in Nannup, Wardandi woman Mitchella Hutchins passed down knowledge about the history of the town and the strong relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. "Thank you fellas for all coming and walking together for a brighter future for all Australians," she said.

These remarkable Australians and so many others have stood with us and pledged their support over the past year. These are the stories that we carry with us across the country; they belong to people who will bring us closer to a successful referendum.

Elders and young people, parents and mayors, community leaders and everyday Australians of every background are helping build the wide public support needed for a strong Yes vote.

And they have told recognition campaigners just why constitutional recognition and the removal of race discrimination matters to them.

The Recognise relay is now preparing to make its way to Cape York and the Torres Strait. Locals will be invited to join the relay at a series of events—and to walk, drive and even ride with it.

In Cape York, Harold Ludwick, a Traditional Owner from the Bulgen Warra group west of Cooktown, said the arrival of the recognition campaigners would be a wonderful opportunity to share information with local communities.

"In the most important document of Australia, the First Australians were denied recognition—but now in the 21st century we are rallying support for the inclusion of Indigenous people in the Constitution," he said.

"This upcoming referendum is crucial to the Indigenous people of Australia and we look forward to welcoming the Recognise mob onto our country."

Torres Strait Regional Authority member and Reconciliation Australia Board director, Kenny Bedford is planning a warm Torres Strait Islander welcome: "The Torres Strait Islands have produced some of our greatest leaders in the quest for equality and recognition. We look very forward to welcoming the Journey to Recognition to our homelands and this chance for our people to be recognised in our nation's Constitution."

"This upcoming referendum is crucial to the Indigenous people of Australia and we look forward to welcoming the Recognise mob onto our country."

As the journey continues, the movement grows.

Since launching in May last year, small relay teams of Recognise campaigners have visited 130 communities and involved more than 10,500 Australians.

Each meeting brings us closer to the day of referendum. Every Australian has a role to play. This is our chance and our choice to write the next chapter of our story together.

Sign up today at [www.recognise.org](http://www.recognise.org)



# Time to complete our Constitution

by Noel Pearson, Chair Cape York Group



Noel Pearson was born and raised in Cooktown, North Queensland, the youngest son of Glen Pearson from the Bagaarmugu clan and Ivy Pearson (formerly Baird) from the Guggu Yalanji peoples. After matriculating from St. Peters Lutheran College in Brisbane, he graduated from Sydney University with degrees in history and law.

Noel has long campaigned for the rights of Cape York Aboriginal people and he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Cape York Land Council in 1990. Over the past 20 years he has been involved in many key Indigenous issues, including the historic Wik decision and the drafting of the Native Title Act in 1993. Noel is presently the Chair of the Cape York Group.

This article is an extract from Noel's Whitlam Oration delivered at the Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney.

*Constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples has been on the agenda for a long time. Now, momentum for change is coming to a head. In January 2012, the Expert Panel delivered its recommendations to Prime Minister Gillard. A public education campaign has been mounted. Lawyers are workshopping possible words and amendments. Politicians are deliberating on changes.*

*To win a referendum, a majority of voters in a majority of states need to vote yes. For that to happen, bipartisan support for the proposal must be achieved. If we expect Australians to vote yes, the general public needs to feel the change is necessary, and understand the problem we are trying to fix. What is wrong with our Constitution the way it is? Why does it need to change?*

*For the most part, our Constitution is fine. It has set up the legal framework for a stable, prosperous democracy in Australia. It is—mostly—written in neutral democratic language. It contains no gender bias. It makes no mention of preferred sexuality. It contains no religious bias. It is primarily a fair and just document, and creates a fair and just democratic system. Except in two respects.*

*There are two problems in our Constitution. The first is the non-recognition of Indigenous peoples. The second is racial discrimination: our Constitution still contains provisions which allow governments to discriminate on the basis of race.*

*Prior to the 1967 referendum, Indigenous peoples were explicitly excluded from the Constitution. Section 127 prevented Indigenous people from being counted in the Census. Indigenous people were also excluded from the scope of Section 51(xxvi), the Race Power. The 1967 referendum reversed this exclusion by deleting Section 127 and deleting the exclusion in Section 51(xxvi).*

*Ironically however, the Constitution now makes no mention of Indigenous peoples whatsoever. As a founding, historical document, our Constitution is inadequate. Mabo overturned the doctrine of terra nullius in Australian domestic law. But our Constitution fails to recognise that this land was not empty when the British arrived. There is no mention of the Indigenous contribution to Australia's heritage and history.*

**“Most would now agree that treating citizens differently on the basis of race is unfair. This is why removal of racial discrimination from the Constitution has strong public support.”**

*The second problem is that the Constitution contains racially discriminatory provisions which enable governments to treat Australian citizens differently on the basis of race. Section 25 contemplates barring races from voting. Section 51(xxvi) gives the Commonwealth the power to pass race-based laws—whether positive or adverse.*

*This allowance and promotion of racial discrimination is at odds with fundamental tenets of democracy: individual equality before the law, the rule of law (in that the same rules should apply to each individual*

*regardless of colour or ethnicity), and the idea that each person's vote should be equal. The racial discrimination in our Constitution is an undemocratic error. On the issue of race, our founding fathers erred.*

*Their error was based on outdated factual and moral beliefs, now known to be incorrect. Racial categorisations between human beings, we now know, have no scientific basis. Race should no longer, therefore, have any legal or policy application. We now understand that there is only one race: the human race.*

*Most would now agree that treating citizens differently on the basis of race is unfair. This is why removal of racial discrimination from the Constitution has strong public support.*

*The race-based approach has also been unsuccessful in addressing the problems we face in Indigenous affairs. This practical failure has had its roots in the philosophical understandings that underpin the race-based approach. Race is a colonial concept. Inherent in the idea of race is the notion that some races are superior and some are inferior. The incorrect notion that Indigenous people belong to an inferior or incapable race has arguably had a poisonous effect on Indigenous policy, law and, consequently, Indigenous people.*

*While in the past there was much adverse discrimination against Indigenous people on the basis of race, now there is positive discrimination—well intentioned—but often with adverse results. Cape York Institute's work in welfare reform has shown us this all too clearly. The race-based approach has perpetuated low expectations and undermined personal responsibility.*

*Consequently, as many Indigenous leaders have argued, the law and public policy often fails to hold Indigenous Australians to*

*the same responsibilities and expectations as other Australians. This attitude does Indigenous people a great disservice.*

*We must unequivocally reject the idea that Indigenous people are innately or biologically disadvantaged. Indigenous people are not an inferior race. Yes, Indigenous people are for the most part socially and economically disadvantaged due to past discrimination, dispossession and other contemporary factors. And yes, we should do everything we can to assist disadvantaged people, black or white. But we should do so on the basis of individual need—not race. A person is not automatically disadvantaged just because he or she is Indigenous. A person should be rewarded on their merits, and assisted in their needs. Race, and Indigeneity, should be irrelevant to matters of public welfare and government assistance.*

*We need to move from Indigenous non-recognition to recognition. And we need to move from a position of racial discrimination in law and public policy, to one of individual equality before the law.*

*Reform for recognition means symbolic constitutional recognition of prior and continuing Indigenous occupation of this land, and recognition that Indigenous cultures, languages and heritage are Australia's cultures, languages and heritage—an important part of our national identity. This is simply a historical truth that should be stated in our founding document. Prime Minister Tony Abbott once said that 'every Australian needs to feel some kind of mystical bond and union with every other Australian... to build a nation.' Arguably that 'mystical bond' is our shared Indigenous heritage, that most ancient part of our national story that has for too long been denied.*

*Our British inheritance is recognised. It has been embodied in the Constitution since 1901: through the English language in which it is written, through the structures of democratic government it sets in place, inherited from the English system of law, and by instating the British monarchy as our Head of State.*

*Australia's Indigenous heritage should rightly sit alongside these fundamental British traditions and institutions. It is, after all, our Indigenous heritage, that gives us that which is unique in the world.*

*Reform for equality before the law means the racially discriminatory Section 25 should be removed. The 'race power' should also be removed and replaced with a new power allowing governments to pass necessary laws specific to Indigenous affairs, such as Native Title and Indigenous heritage laws. But the new Indigenous affairs power should not be used for matters of public welfare or government socioeconomic assistance. These matters should be addressed not on the basis of Indigeneity, but on the basis of individual and community need. This distinction should be made clear in the drafting.*

**“It is the confirmation that all Australians are equal before the law that legitimises and makes acceptable the symbolic recognition of Indigenous history and heritage.”**

*In addition to removing the two racially discriminatory provisions, Australia should adopt a new constitutional provision prohibiting racial discrimination in laws and policies and ensuring equality before the law with respect to race, ethnicity and colour. This is necessary to overturn the racially discriminatory precedent that has built up since 1901, through legislation, policies and case law. The Race Power and Section 25 established the wrong principle in our Constitution. A new, correct principle needs to be set in place. Simple removal of discriminatory provisions is insufficient.*

*Those on the left have long argued that we should stop the adverse discrimination against Indigenous people. Those on the right often argue we should stop the perceived preferential treatment of Indigenous people. The balanced 'radical centre' position, and arguably the fair and correct position in a just democracy, is to eliminate both adverse and preferential treatment on racial grounds.*

*The most common objection to the propositions I have made for constitutional reform on the basis of Indigenous recognition and equality before the law, is that there is a contradiction between the two principles, or that they are separate and should be dealt with separately. But this in my view is incorrect.*

*The racial discrimination allowed by our Constitution is inextricably linked to the Indigenous history we want recognised. So extreme was the discrimination against Indigenous people, it initially even denied that we existed. This is what Indigenous recognition is all about—overturning the fallacies of non-existence and racial inequality.*

*There is no contradiction in saying we recognise the importance of the nation's unique Indigenous heritage and history, while at the same time confirming that we are all equal on the basis of our shared and equal Australian citizenship. The two propositions are complementary. The one entails the other. What's more, both propositions are politically necessary.*

*It is the confirmation that all Australians are equal before the law that legitimises and makes acceptable the symbolic recognition of Indigenous history and heritage. It confirms we are not creating a separate category of special treatment or collapsing into cultural relativism. It confirms that the same rules should apply to all Australians.*

*Likewise, it is the symbolic recognition of Indigenous heritage, languages and cultures, that confirms that the 'one land, one law' principle need not dissolve into mere assimilation and cultural loss. Equality before the law needs to go hand in hand with a renewed appreciation of the nation's rich Indigenous traditions that in our national psyche should carry as much pride as our British traditions and institutions.*

*This land was not terra nullius when the British ships arrived. But recognition should go with equality. This is the yin and the yang. The amendment proposition needs to have this balance.*

*Indigenous recognition and equality before the law are correct principles for a fairer, more reconciled nation. We first need to agree on this. Then, the challenge will be for the lawyers and drafters to express these principles, carefully and precisely, in the right constitutional amendments.*



# No reason to unbolt the RDA

The mooted changes to the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) do not bode well for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Should section 18c of the RDA be repealed, the protection against acts that are likely to 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate' on the basis of race would be erased.

While the consultation phase on amendments to the RDA is now over, the Board of Reconciliation Australia reiterates its strong objection to any changes that weaken the protections against racial discrimination.

The RDA currently ensures all Australians are protected from discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, descent or ethnic origin.

We share the concerns strongly expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and leaders from the Greek, Jewish, Chinese, Arab, Armenian and Korean communities who have spoken out against the changes saying that all Australians have the right to be protected against racial discrimination and vilification.

And the vast majority of Australians agree.

A recent Nielsen poll found 88 per cent of respondents believe it should be unlawful to offend, insult or humiliate based on race. In other words nearly nine out of 10 Australians disagree with the Government's proposed changes.

As Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane says, that's because there is nothing wrong with the current laws.

"I think there's a resounding statement here of Australia's racial tolerance. People see no

need to change laws that have been in place for almost 20 years, laws which have worked well," he said.

"It's important that we have laws that reflect our commitment to values of civility, decency and racial tolerance, and that's what we're seeing through this poll."

Reconciliation Australia condemns all forms of racism. Racism is harmful. It destroys the confidence, self-esteem and health of individuals, undermines efforts to create fair and inclusive communities, breaks down relationships and erodes trust.

Racism perpetuates inequalities and can directly or indirectly exclude people from accessing services and opportunities. Racism remains a major barrier to achieving our vision for a just, equitable and reconciled Australia. It remains a barrier to governments seeking to close the gap on health outcomes, and to improve economic participation through employment and education.

The fact is that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience racism on a far too regular basis.

But little by little that is changing.

In recent years we have seen a generally calm and reasoned debate about the terrible impact of racism and its place in Australia's history and the relationships between the First Peoples and other Australians.

Australia's sporting codes in particular have shown great leadership in banning racism from the sporting field and working hard to better educate sports fans and the general

public about the detestable nature of racism and bigotry.

Similarly, our own Reconciliation Action Plan program stimulates awareness and understanding of racism in the workplace and has had a marked effect in fostering better staff relations in hundreds of organisations.

Nevertheless, in the past year, the Australian Human Rights Commission has seen a 57 per cent increase in complaints based on racial abuse, further evidence that the protections provided by the RDA should remain intact to ensure racial tolerance in a multicultural society.

Like other Australians we strongly value the concept of freedom of speech, but that freedom must always be balanced against the rights of others.

Reconciliation Australia urges the Government to heed the views of nine out of ten Australians and withdraw its draft changes to the RDA. The Act has served us well in its present form for the past 20 years and there is simply no compelling reason to alter it.



*Racism. It Stops with Me* and the *Anti-Hate* campaigns have joined forces to promote the good stuff people do to show they don't accept racism in the community.

**Rant against racism** invites you to tell how you stood up to racist behaviour using wit, humour, anger or simply by quietly making your point. Your story will put you in the draw to win a prize. Remember, every time we ignore a hateful comment we are supporting it. By allowing the minority to speak on our behalf, we hurt our friends and divide our community.

So enter now at [www.rantagainstracism.com.au](http://www.rantagainstracism.com.au) and share your story.

All entries will be posted online at [antihate.vic.gov.au](http://antihate.vic.gov.au). The top five entries will each receive a \$100 JB HiFi voucher. Winners will be notified and entries will be published on 1 July 2014.

**The Board of Reconciliation Australia: Peter Nash, Joy Thomas, Jason Glanville, Djapirri Mununggirritj, Co-Chair Melinda Cilento, Kirstie Parker, Co-Chair Dr Tom Calma AO, The Hon Fred Chaney AO and Dr Ken Henry AC, absent: Kenny Bedford. (Image by Lindi Heap)**



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