

Bunbilla yarnteen ngurra-yelleeke (Listen everyone and take note)

Wurreker

Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group

Newsletter No. 127
February 2001

ATSIC and a Treaty

The ATSIC Board of Commissioners has decided to commit to a process of developing a Treaty between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. ATSIC emphasises the Treaty process as being representative at regional levels. Importantly, ATSIC is not negotiating a Treaty - the right to negotiate a treaty is to be exercised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in whatever manner they decide, through the Treaty process.

The following is a Treaty Pamphlet distributed by ATSIC to mark the beginning of an information campaign. It provides introductory information concerning ATSIC's role in the process.

What is Treaty?

A treaty is an agreement between two or more parties who seek to have their relationship with each other spelt out. Principles underlying a treaty may include:

- recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia and of the distinct rights which flow from this
- agreement to the necessary reforms for a more just society
- the setting of national standards to inform local or regional treaties and agreements.

In its final report to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation recommended the establishment of an agreement or treaty process to negotiate the unresolved issues of reconciliation.

Why a Treaty?

A treaty between Indigenous peoples and Australia could have recognised and protected Indigenous rights and led to a just constitutional basis for the Australian Federation.

Instead, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were completely overlooked as relevant parties in the formation of the Australian Federation. The time is right to talk about a treaty with the approach of the Centenary of Federation. Even the word 'federate' derives from a Latin word meaning 'to make a treaty'. A recent AC Nielsen Age poll showed that 53 per cent of Australians are ready to embrace the concept of a treaty. A national treaty here will reflect an Australia that has matured as a nation. It's important to realise that a national treaty does not stop Indigenous communities and other local, regional, state and territory stakeholders from signing treaties with each other at those levels.

Canada, USA and New Zealand all have treaties with Indigenous peoples and it is time for Australia to reach for the same recognition of partnership.

Benefits of a Treaty?

A properly negotiated binding treaty will deliver:

- agreed standards
- a framework for settling relationships between Indigenous peoples and governments at local, regional, state, territory and federal levels
- legal recognition including constitutional recognition that

continues page 3

!!! Our Next Meeting !!!

We invite our members and friends to meet at the Newcastle Foreshore at the old rail shed for a barbecue. This is to be an informal, social gathering instead of our usual February meeting. Members are asked to bring a salad to share.

**Wednesday, 28th February 2001 at 6pm
at the Foreshore**

Please RSVP, by Monday 26th February for catering purposes, phone 49636143

Past Present Future

A Youth Reconciliation Week

Thursday 22 March – Friday 30 March 2001, for the Centenary of Federation

Past Present Future Week is a week for both young and old to both learn about and celebrate Indigenous history and culture in Newcastle.

The Past Present Future Project is a Centenary of Federation Project. As Australian Federation did not include or even acknowledge Indigenous people's as citizens of Australia, it is imperative that Indigenous Issues are addressed throughout the Centenary of Federation, and that we continue our efforts to the ongoing reconciliation process.

The 2nd Youth Reconciliation Gathering at the Palais Royale Youth Venue on Friday 30th March 2001 is a focal point for the week. However we are encouraging all young people, students, parents and community members to make their own 'reconciliation' walk around Newcastle and attend the many fantastic events that are show casing our local Indigenous culture.

There is also a fantastic Arts Competition for young people to enter and express how they feel about reconciliation (phone 742091 for details), and a time capsule will be buried at the Newcastle Museum to be unearthed in 50 years time. Boxes are being left at high schools and local libraries so that all young people will have a chance to contribute.

More events are currently being organised, and if your organisation would like to organise your own reconciliation event in conjunction with the Past Present Future Project then please let Project Coordinator Nicole Pietsch know. We are also welcoming people to be involved with organising the project, helping to promote the project, and of course attending all the wonderful events.

So stay tuned for details! Most of the events are free or gold coin donation, and we look forward to seeing you there!

Thursday, 22 March 2001, 6pm

Exhibition Launch: "Mixed Mobs" A History of Aboriginal People in the Hunter. Newcastle Regional Museum, 787 Hunter Street, Newcastle.

Wednesday, 28 March 2001, 7pm

"Cooee" – Indigenous Film Night. Palais Royale Youth Venue, 694 Hunter Street, Newcastle, gold coin donation.

Thursday, 29 March 2001, 6pm

Exhibition Launch: Purrimaibahn Unit Hunter TAFE, Newcastle Regional Museum, 787 Hunter Street, Newcastle.

Friday, 30 March 2001, 9am– 3pm

Past Present Future Second Youth Reconciliation Gathering, speakers, workshops, cultural performances, bush tucker, arts and more. Palais Royale Youth Venue 694 Hunter Street, Newcastle.

Friday, 30 March 2001, 6pm – 11pm

Da Bounce Factor, All ages, Dj's, rap, hip hop, RnB ~ \$5, NO drugs, NO alcohol, fully supervised. Palais Royale Youth Venue, 694 Hunter Street, Newcastle.

For more information please call Nicole Pietsch 4974 2091 email: trickinicki@hotmail.com or drop into the Palais Royale Youth Venue 694 Hunter Street Newcastle 2300.

Nicole Pietsch

The Currawong Project

It was a wonderful afternoon with King Edward Park looking green and shady and the sun glinting off the sea. A crowd gathered and sat talking under the trees, taking time to renew old acquaintances and relax in anticipation of an interesting afternoon.

Father Tony Stace welcomed everyone, especially the two guests of honour, Paul Walsh and Ray Kelly. He explained that the name 'Currawong' symbolised the joining together of the black and white communities of Newcastle, to work on this project, the creation of the bush gardens and trails at Yallahah, the Aboriginal centre at the John Hunter hospital. Yallahah, meaning 'the meeting place' is aptly named.

He acknowledged the Awabakal ownership of the park and introduced Louise Campbell, who welcomed us as guests of the Awabakal and explained that the word 'Awabakal' meant 'people of the water' and the Aboriginal word for Newcastle is Muloobinba, meaning the meeting of the waters. Louise spoke of the currawong with its black and white colouring and its distinctive two note harmony a suitable symbol of reconciliation between black and white.

Dr Kathryn McGrath head of the Hunter Health Board spoke next, thanking the Aboriginal community for their welcome and for their input into Yallahah Place that has become such an asset to Newcastle.

A ceremony of the inter-twinning of the two flags took place with Tamara Kelly and Margaret Fenwick holding the Aboriginal flag and Kath and Kevin Claydon, the Australian flag.

Ray Kelly then told of his thoughts at that morning's citizenship ceremony and what it meant to be an Australian. He regards the Currawong project as an important step towards reconciliation, and thanked Dr McGrath for her support for Yallahah and the Currawong project. He described the planting of the seeds as symbolic of planting for a better future. 'We think things will get better, but we must walk forward together and work towards reconciliation.' Speaking for Paul and himself, Ray thanked their two wives, Susan and Mandy, for their forbearance and for being the 'strong people behind the scenes'.

Paul Walsh then spoke, He has been awarded the title of Newcastle Citizen of the Year for his work in collating the Novocastrian Tales and donating the proceeds from the book to Yallahah. He said that Aborigines had always been portrayed as belonging to an ancient culture but, as well as that proud claim, they were also a modern progressive people, looking forward to the future. The seed planting ceremony was a sign of faith in that future. Yallahah is dedicated as a shared place, a memorial to co-operation between both groups of Australians and it is the first joint memorial in Australia. He urged everyone to take part in Currawong 2001 — by helping plant the native bush garden.

Father Tony then urged everyone to come into the rotunda to view the spectacular cake baked and decorated by Bradley Brown, before it was cut and shared around. It was a fitting end to an afternoon that left everyone feeling proud and optimistic. We look forward to more of these communal gatherings.

We encourage your participation in the 'Currawong Project' (see *The Newcastle Harold*, Saturday, 3 February 2001).

Pat Keating

Congratulations

Pat Doolan

Pat Doolan, one time resident of Bourke now living in Dubbo was awarded the Public Service Medal in the Australia Day Honours List, for her outstanding public service. Pat has served her community, particularly indigenous people for many years in her position with the Department of Community services.

Pat has been employed in the public sector since 1978 and has maintained a high profile in each community in which she has lived.

One particularly outstanding and significant contribution that she has made is related to developing an Aboriginal specific Grief and Loss program that recognises the particular cultural needs and addresses the loss experienced by many Aboriginal people and communities.

Speaking from Dubbo, Pat said she still has not really taken it in that she received the award. "My family are delighted," she said. "I could not do the work I do without the huge support which my family gave me and without my faith in God." (*The Western Herald*, 1 February 2001)

My own friendship with Pat and association with her in some of her projects were frequently around the interests of children and women. She was first a teaching assistant and later director of the Bourke preschool ; a school initiated and supported by University of NSW and later Wollongong University, with the aim of enriching the language of rural children, both indigenous and non-indigenous. She was very interested in language and I remember one fascinating discussion with her when she described obvious differences in the speech of Bourke and neighbouring Brewarrina.

The International Year of Children, and that of Women provided a focus in an isolated community for developing ideas and co-operation among disparate groups, and Pat played a leading role. She was similarly active in the newly created Bourke Community Radio, encouraging Aboriginal participation, including one of her sons who regularly sang and read his own songs and poetry on air. She and her husband Terry were leaders in their church group. Geoff Doolan of Newcastle is Pat Doolan's brother in law.

Pat Cameron

continued from page 1

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have inherent rights which must inform all processes of governments in Australia

- improved services such as health, housing, education and employment in accordance with the legitimate aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

The Road Ahead

Although there is strong support throughout the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for a treaty, there is no agreed arrangement for representatives to negotiate a treaty on behalf of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the true spirit of self-determination, the right to negotiate a treaty is to be exercised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in whatever manner they decide through the treaty process.

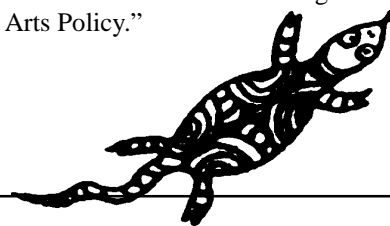
Ray Kelly

Via *The Koori Mail*, Wednesday, 13 December 2001, we learn that Ray Kelly has been appointed as one of four new members to The Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Arts Board.

"The new members are Peter Bertani, Lenore Dembski, Ray Kelly and Sandra Phillips. Federal Minister for the Arts Peter McGauran said: "These new members will add to the significant expertise already present on the board and will expand on its success." Mr Bertani is manager of Indigenous Outreach for the South Australian Museum. Mrs Dembski is manager of staff development and training of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in Darwin. Mr Kelly is the chief executive officer for the Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-operative. Ms Phillips is a freelance editor and writer for the Queensland Writers Institute, Away! Indigenous Arts on ABC Radio National, and the University of Queensland Press." ... "Strong on artistic merit and organisational skills, these appointments will carry on the important work of the ATSI Arts Board now and in the future," Mr McGauran said.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to claim, control and enhance their cultural inheritance. The board supports this right through its grant categories and through the implementation of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Policy."

Anne Too



The process will be an inclusive one and will focus on the need to:

- promote and encourage discussion and informed debate within the Indigenous and broader Australian community on the concept of a treaty (or treaties)
- cooperate with others and coordinate resources to advance the treaty process
- actively encourage Australian governments and other parties to enter into a treaty
- provide community education and awareness programs.

Where It's At

Following meetings of key Indigenous leaders, agreement has been reached with the support of ATSIC to:

- set up a National Treaty Support Group
- convene a national 'Think Tank'
- encourage the setting up of a network of regional Think Tanks/Support Groups.

A number of ways you can help:

- register your interest by joining us
- set up local or regional support groups
- participate in local initiatives.

For further information, see www.treatynow.org

The above information is supplied by the National Treaty Support Group

State Reconciliation Committee

Last November representatives of Local Reconciliation Groups from all over NSW met with the State Reconciliation Committee (SRC) in Sydney to discuss the future of the reconciliation movement in NSW. The NSW SRC gets ongoing government funding (the only state). They employ a full time executive officer (Sue Lindsay) who has a desk in the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs. At the meeting it was decided that the best way to continue the people's movement for reconciliation when the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation ended at the end of 2000 was for the SRC to become an Incorporated Association.

An interim board was appointed to organise the incorporation and continue the work of the state committee until the first AGM. This board consists of most of the former members of the SRC, in order to retain their expertise, and of eight regional representatives. For the term of this Interim Board the state has been divided into 4 regions, north, west, south and Sydney, with an indigenous and non-indigenous representative for each region. We are in the north region and our representatives are Larry Kelly and Deb Church. At the first AGM the regional representation on the SRC will be increased.

The suggested benefits of incorporation are that local reconciliation groups (LRGs) who join will be covered for public liability insurance, be able to receive funding from government as well as private sources, and would be able to employ staff. Groups will remain autonomous and decide their own activities and direction but be able to access resources and information from the SRC and the network of LRGs. Membership of the SRC is as a group not as individual members, and each group elects a delegate to attend state meetings. There will be no joining fee for the SRC but local groups can have their own membership fees as we do now. If a LRG joins the SRC they will have to provide a list of their members, which will give a big list state wide for lobbying etc.

When the incorporation is finalised our group will need to decide if we want to join this state body.

The wording of the basic objects of the Association is still being finalised but the main ideas are to:

1. promote a process of reconciliation between the First Peoples and the wider Australian community, based on an appreciation by the Australian community as a whole of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements and of the unique position of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the indigenous peoples of Australia and by means that include the fostering of an ongoing commitment at local, NSW and national levels to address the disadvantage of the First Peoples.
2. undertake and support initiatives to promote reconciliation
3. promote by leadership, education and discussion a deeper understanding by all Australians of our shared history and the cultures, dispossession and continuing disadvantage of the First Peoples, and of the need to address that disadvantage.

Apart from the decisions about incorporation there were workshops on Local reconciliation Projects such as the Myall Creek Memorial and the Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy. Other workshops were on Strategies for

Reconciliation, and State Government Linkages. There were also some excellent keynote addresses, as well as time to discuss with people from all over NSW what is happening in their area.

Some of the main ideas that came up frequently over the two days were that reconciliation needs to be achieved by partnerships between indigenous and non-indigenous people; that ideas have to be generated at the local level with the needs being identified by local communities; that reconciliation is not just about practical outcomes, it is also about challenging ourselves to live our own lives differently, but lobbying is part of it because there is the need to achieve basic human rights.

I came back from the meeting feeling very inspired about the possibilities of doing far more about reconciliation in our town. I also am convinced that we need to seriously take up the challenge of working in partnerships with local Aboriginal people. I believe that while the education of non-Aboriginal people is an important part of what our group does, if we are not working in a way that involves Aboriginal people as equal participants we will not know what are the important issues, what we should focus on, or what is happening for Aboriginal people in our town. If we are to achieve our objective of promoting better understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians we need to talk with each other, and we need to have Indigenous people involved in the planning of our activities.

At the meeting in Sydney some Indigenous speakers stressed 50/50 participation. While this may not be possible in numbers, maybe we could aim for it in the spirit of equal input into decisions. We need to have Aboriginal people as part of our group, not just people who come to speak to the group. If we are to give support to initiatives proposed by Indigenous groups at the local level our group needs to be more accessible to them. I have noticed that at most of our meetings there are sometimes no Aboriginal people and always very few, and our meetings set them up as experts who tell us information. How many of us really get to talk with Aboriginal people at our meetings? Even if we chat over a cuppa when we go home most of us may never see that person again, or not for a few years. I keep thinking there's got to be a better way.

At the state meeting much of the discussion centred on the importance of indigenous involvement in LRGs and the following strategies to increase Indigenous representation were suggested:

1. Provide transport to functions
2. Where possible provide food
3. Move away from formal meetings to social events
4. Work in partnership with Aboriginal organisations
5. Have the meetings at the premises of Aboriginal organisations
6. Meeting agendas need relevant issues and need to be project orientated
7. Consult and work with elders
8. Phone people the day before meetings or other events

Maybe some of these ideas will be useful to our group.

Lyndall Coan

Donations to Jack Doherty Scholarships

“Marjorie, you’re worth your weight in gold”, I almost began to say, while taking delivery of several boxes of kindling, when I recalled the time when she had almost been. We have always mentioned the names of donors, but for obvious reasons, not the names given. I feel it should now be said, however, that Marjorie Lambert once gave what amounted to a bequest, financing two years scholarships in their entirety.

The fund has also benefited by the repeated generosity of several parishes. One, St. Alban’s, Muswellbrook, in fact paid the cost of half a scholarship (at today’s increased value), for three consecutive years.

The names of donors in the last three years are now here repeated, as there has been some confusion in previous acknowledgment. These gifts range from \$5 to \$1000. St. Alban’s Anglican Parish, Muswellbrook, Anglican Diocese, Anglican Women of Newcastle Diocese, Margaret Badger, Don Bowman, Griselda Browne, Central Coast Peace Forum, Margaret Christiansen, Amy Cockburn, Joy Cummings, Vera Deacon, Hon. Richard Face, Rev. G.C.Garnsey, Zeny and John Giles, Janet Hallinan, Ms. M.A. Harvey, Dr. F.Hendry, Greg Heys, Kelly Hoare MHR, Bob Jackson, Phyl Jones, John Manning, Joan Mason, Mrs. D. McEwan, Max McVie, John Mills MLA, R & D Reed, V. Peterson and P. Poole, A&P Palmer, Rev. I. Palmer, M. Purkiss, Lorraine Robertson, Marilyn Ryan, Catholic Parish, Broadmeadow, M Steinberger, Dr. J.Talbot, Trevor Dunn Solicitors, Union of Australian Women, Margaret Wilson, Yanteen Corporation. Others have indicated that they do not wish to be acknowledged.

Rodney Knock

We would also like to acknowledge a recent kind donation to the Jack Doherty Aboriginal Scholarships Fund from the Central Coast Peace Forum. The Central Coast Peace Forum has been meeting for the past 16 years, being concerned to act on issues of peace and justice. In deciding to discontinue as a group, the decision had been made to forward fund monies to the Jack Doherty Scholarships. Our grateful thanks and best wishes to Mr Jack Forward, Hon Secretary and members of your group.

Anne Too for the NASG

Northern Territory Election Strategy

Native Title and mining have again surfaced as issues in the NT election. They are once again being used to create division and mistrust of Aboriginal policies. Support for this comes once again from the Federal Parliament. Resource Development Minister Daryl Manzie has made several ill-informed and false comments in Parliament and in the media about mining and native title.

Among these is an assertion that the land councils have not attempted to deal with applications. In fact the land councils are having to deal with a recent flood of released government applications which abuse the intention of federal legislation; while the statistics confute the claim that the councils are holding up mining exploration.

Rodney Knock

Land Rights

Prime Minister John Howard appears determined to ignore the recommendations of his own Parliamentary Committee in pushing through changes to the Northern Territory Land Rights Act.

He told Federal Parliament in October that the Federal Government would be “carefully guided” by the Reeves Review to the Land Rights Act, in spite of the fact that the Reeves Review has been soundly criticised by experts and politicians throughout the country.

An article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* indicates that the Government has a set of amendments to the Act ready for Cabinet which draw heavily on the Reeves proposals in 1998, and include:

- Compulsory acquisition powers for the Northern Territory Government
- Weakening the “veto” right of Aboriginal people
- Transfer of control over sacred sites to the Northern Territory Government.

The number one recommendation of the House of Representatives Committee was that no changes should be made to the Land Rights Act without the consent of traditional owners and affected Aboriginal people.

Pat Cameron



Land Title

A block of land and the historic old building that stood upon it since the 1880s were handed over to the Awabakal Land Council in January this year. Formerly known as the Coutts Sailors Home this beautiful old Victorian building stood neglected for years on 88 Scotts Street. Owned by the State Government, it was offered to the Newcastle Council who turned it down because of the million dollar plus cost of restoration. It was about to be auctioned when the Awabakal Land Council expressed an interest and the Government passed it over with some relief. The Chairman of the Land Council, Mr Kevin McKenny, is considering an art gallery, a small museum and perhaps a restaurant for the building when it is restored. It will provide a meeting place for the Aboriginal people, on the original harbour foreshore where so many of their ancestors once lived. This is a great chance, not only to restore and preserve the heritage building, but to give recognition to the indigenous owners. A similar project in Melbourne is hailed as the primary draw-card for overseas tourists. It is to be hoped that other bodies decide to assist the Land Council with its mammoth task. Properly restored and run as Mr McKenny proposes it would enhance this gracious part of the city and this could be an opportunity for other organisations to show a real interest in reconciliation by offering support.

From *The Newcastle Herald*, 2 February 2001, article by Ian Kirkwood.

Pat Keating

Not Good Enough

It's time to reassess as a new millennium begins. For the membership of the Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group, the past twenty years has provided a steep learning curve towards an understanding, however limited, of the consequences the arrival of Europeans had, for the indigenous inhabitants of this land. Our understanding is limited, because, although now knowing the history, it is necessarily beyond our experience to be able to feel the loss, which is a part of 'black being' in this country.

Following from the bridge walks, we know there are thousands like us who wish to move on, who want to see to 'unfinished business'. Hypocrisy of Governments can no longer be defended. It is not good enough, that incoming governments, of new or old persuasions, can water down legislation to suit vested interests. It is a matter of justice and morality.

Todd Condie, (*The Koori Mail*, 24 January 2001), writes in "The Road Ahead"...

"With a proposed treaty process between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians on the national agenda, Survival Day 2001 has a particular relevance this year to the many 'survivors' of this country's Centenary of Federation."

Condie considers this year, "a crossroad in Australia's history, where Australians are being asked 'what road do we take into this century?' For some it means walking down the road that maintains the status quo, and a comfortable view of Australia's past. For others, it means going down a path that takes stock of Australia's history, acknowledges that a system of dispossession took place in this country, looks at areas of redress and meaningful healing, and moves forward."

"For indigenous Australians, the road towards a brighter future is still under construction, and ultimately will be lengthened or shortened depending on how many non-indigenous Australians look at the 'Aboriginal problem' and offer a helping hand-not a hand out, rather a hand up."

Condie goes on to mention the late Kumantjayi Perkins, the subject of a tribute at this year's 10th Survival Concert in Sydney, as "One man who fought hard for the rights of indigenous peoples, and made his own track in the sand..."

It is not good enough: that the Federal Government allows mandatory sentencing to continue and that it ignores the UN human rights committee's criticism. "There is no defence to mandatory sentencing. The Government's only defence is to place itself in the same company as the pariah states of Burma, North Korea, China and others that reject examination of their human rights records by international bodies."

"The North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (NAALAS) has complained to the UN Human Rights Committee that mandatory sentencing contravened the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

"The Government has until next month to respond. It remains non-committal about whether that response will be made public. NT Law Society president Jon Tippett said the Government had a responsibility to reveal its position to the Australian public."

(Extracts from the *The Koori Mail*, Wednesday, 24 January 2001 ... 'Govt 'secrecy' attacked')

Not good enough: the Federal Government's insensitivity to the stolen generations, it's lack of response to the Senate Inquiry into the Stolen Generations Committee Report.

Worse still, an official denial of the stolen generations. We need a government whose members and leader are willing to say sorry on behalf of the nation. The lack of implementation of the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, is another area where not enough is being done.

In this year of the centenary of Federation, it is entirely appropriate that we have a government willing to address these inequity's. Of course we need a new Constitution, in which indigenous people and their rights are recognised. It must also be said that the greatest need is to reach the hearts and minds of those in the white community who oppose inclusion, either through ignorance or indoctrination which has been a pall on past and present generations.

In 'your say' *The Koori Mail*, Wednesday, January 10, 2001, ATSIIC chairman, Geoff Clark writes, ... "Two terrible defects weaken the foundations of the modern Australian nation that were laid in 1901: Racism and inequality, and the suppression of our true history."

"During the colonisation of Australia, no treaties or agreements were negotiated with the first peoples. Indigenous people's rights were ignored from the moment of the arrival of the British, through to debates and conventions leading up to the adoption of the Constitution in 1901."

"In 1901, the 'founding fathers', failed to recognise the inherent rights of Australia's indigenous peoples within the Constitution. We were and remain, Constitutional strangers in our own land. We have now walked the walk. We have talked the talk. Now is the time for action. It is now time to entrench a culture of human rights in our own country. Let us start the Centenary of Federation celebrations on a pledge to work together to end poverty and inequality. We can and must do it."

"We must continue to encourage recognition and reconciliation by paying due respect to all our cultures, languages and religions. We must wipe out the legacy of racism and discrimination. My challenge is to ensure that indigenous rights become a living reality."

"In 1901, the colonies of Australia joined to create a new federation. In 2001, it is the aspiration of Australia's indigenous peoples to negotiate a place in that federation."

"Now is the time to right the wrongs of the past."

There is the challenge, let us all listen and take heed!

Anne Too

Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group...

was formed in September 1980. It meets bi-monthly and sends out a newsletter shortly before each meeting. Membership of the Support Group is open to all who share its objectives:

- Promoting better understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Giving support to initiatives proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups both locally and nationally.

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The Right of Common Access

Discussion of land rights in Australia often draws on other commonwealth countries for information and comparison. The survey journal *Measure and Map* (January 2001) has an interesting article on landownership' access to land and change to meet modern needs, in Sweden.

"In the Nordic countries land ownership has never given the landowner a right of unqualified possession. Other citizens have the right to use the land. That is what is meant by the Right of Common Access.

In Sweden today more than 90% of all land is privately owned. However, this means something quite different from its meaning in Anglo Saxon societies. A citizen may walk freely over the land, put up a tent for a night, pick berries and mushrooms etc. There are limitations however."

"There is no law regarding The Right of Common Access, but since 1994 this right has been registered in the provision of the constitution concerning rights and privileges. The constitution says: 'All people shall have the right to use the Swedish countryside'. In this way the Right of Common Access is protected in law and should be seen as a restriction in favour of the public interest.

The Right of Common Access also contains an obligation on whoever uses the land. Environmental Legislation in 1999 enjoins "all users to show proper respect for the countryside."

The Right of Common Access goes back hundreds of years. The principal purpose was to ensure that one had the right to use some of the products to sustain one on a journey.

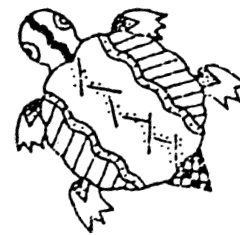
But over a long time the meaning of these rights has

changed due to change in development technology eg. cars, commercial land use, tourism etc.. A potential for conflict is emerging in some cases. The writer of this article says the way to overcome this and to preserve traditional rights is through information.

"Information is fundamental. Large groups, individual users, politicians and decision-makers have to be informed in different ways, of the rights and duties in force. We believe an example of an appropriate way to do this is to combine information about our own forest activity with information about The Right of Common Access. We as landholders have to face the fact that the Right is a feature of our ownership.

The Right of Common Access is the most Swedish phenomenon that we can point to. In spite of lack of legal control and changed conditions, The Right of Common Access is an unchangeable national symbol."

Pat Cameron



Acknowledgement

Thank you to Anna Kaemmerling and all contributors to our newsletter.

Our next meeting: 6:00 pm Wednesday 28 February 2001
at the Fore Shore

We invite our members and friends to meet at the Newcastle foreshore at the old rail shed for a barbecue. This is to be an informal, social gathering instead of our usual February meeting. Members are asked to bring a salad to share.

Please RSVP by Monday 26 February for catering purposes, phone 4963 6143.

Membership Subscription Form

Members of the NASG receive the bi-monthly NASG newsletter, Wurreker, and agree to support the stated objectives of the NASG.

Membership: what you can afford, eg \$25 - \$30 for waged, \$8 - \$10 for unwaged, organisations \$35 - \$55. Bulk orders: 5 copies for \$35 per annum, 10 copies for \$55 per annum. Non-member subscription: \$30.

Non-member: individuals or organisations may subscribe to Wurreker for \$30 per annum. Send renewals or non-member subscriptions to: NASG, PO Box 79, Broadmeadow 2292.

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Bits and Pieces

New Governor

Marie Bashir, named to become the next Governor of New South Wales, has declared reconciliation with the indigenous community and bridging the divide between social groups as her key priorities.

Speaking for the first time since her appointment, Dr Bashir, said she was deeply honoured to have been given the role.

“(I’m) absolutely overawed, humbled, honoured and inspired to do something worthwhile,” she said. Dr Bashir said her parents had instilled social values during her childhood which would be of great advantage in her new position. “They brought us up to believe that we did have a duty to fellow man,” she said. Dr Bashir grew up in a country town (Narrandera) with a large Aboriginal population.

From The Koori Mail



Claiming a Continent

A New History of Australia. By David Day, Harper Collins, 352pp, \$27. 50

Above all, asserts David Day, the history of modern Australia has been “the ongoing story of the struggle by European Australians to claim the continent as their own”.

The Portuguese, French, Spanish and Dutch all sought ‘the famed Terra Australis’ but the British gave it the global dimension that supplanted indigenous claims. As Day observes in his challenging study, while Captain Cook noted of the Aborigines that “the Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all the things necessary for life”, that didn’t prevent him showing “a complete disregard for their land rights”.

From “Miscellany” by Tony Maniaty. The Weekend Australian, 3-4 February 2001

The Koori Mail, News of Interest

29 November 2000 – Four Aboriginal men, as a team, raised \$1000 for Community Aid Abroad when they contested the Adelaide Trailwalker 2000 event, covering 100 km over mountains and swamps in 26 hours and 45 minutes.

Mick Dodson addressed over 400 people in Geelong, on the strategies for achieving reconciliation. In reply to a non-indigenous question he said, “Sis, take our hand and walk with us in the journey of reconciliation and we’ll tell you when you’re out of step.” (Vintage Dodson).

Aboriginal land owners in northern Australia are joining forces with quarantine scientists to protect their land and food supplies from exotic pests and diseases. 15 rangers from the Djelk, Owenpelli and Ramingining communities in Arnhem Land completed a two day course in pest and disease identification at Maningrida in September. This vulnerable coastline is 75% Aboriginal owned.

15 November 2000 – We are pleased to see the paper praising Lismore’s Ypung and Powerful School, who are subscribers to Wurreker. It has had success in improving literacy skills among it’s students one third of whom are Aboriginal. Unfortunately its director, Maureen Moran, says it is facing financial difficulties through lack of interest by the wider community and government. Its aim is to increase skills; it is not for troubled children or children in trouble. For more information on supporting the school contact 02 6621 7721.

Grieving Relatives seek Annual Sentence Rally

Grieving relatives of a 15-year-old orphan who committed suicide in a Darwin detention centre requested that the anniversary of his death today become an annual rally against mandatory sentencing.

Federal politicians representing Labor, Australian Democrats and Greens sent messages of support to the first anniversary rally in an inner-city park in Darwin.

The boy, who was referred to by his father’s name, Benjamin, yesterday in respect of the Aboriginal custom of not naming the dead, hanged himself in the Don Dale Detention Centre only days before he would have finished a 28-day mandatory sentence.

The Newcastle Herald, Saturday, 10 February 2001

If you do not wish to continue receiving this newsletter, please return to:
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