

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

# Wurreker

Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group

Newsletter No. 134

April 2002

## Self Determination

Self determination is increasingly becoming a focus of Indigenous demand, and Minister Ruddock's 5 Point Plan has fuelled this demand as Indigenous people see it as disguised assimilation. That this is a response widely held by Aboriginal leaders was reported by Debra Jopson, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Edition, 6-7 April 2002. I list the plan here as it is apparent that it will continue to be a focus for Indigenous demand, and as misinformation accumulates in much of the mainstream media we need to be certain of our own understanding.

1. Shift the policy emphasis towards individuals and families.
2. Target primary school students' literacy and numeracy skills.
3. Equal emphasis on each individual's responsibilities as well as rights.
4. Substance abuse should be a central focus of Indigenous health strategies.
5. Ensure general programs cater to Aboriginals so Indigenous-specific funds go to areas of greatest need.

Jopson quotes Noel Pearson and Marcia Langton, among other Indigenous leaders. "A rule of thumb in relation to most of the programs and policies that pose as progressive thinking in Indigenous affairs is that if we did the opposite we would have the chance of making progress." (Pearson)

Langton says "We spent thirty years of our lives setting up these organisations, (legal, medical, housing etc. of the 70s), but cannot move any further forward. ... Government structures were heavily focused on Aboriginal organisations being

accountable for 'the mythological tax-payer dollar'. ... Instead of missionaries we have an army of accountants."

In the light of Indigenous response to the 5-point plan and the responses, only partially quoted above, from Pearson and Langton, the fourth overland lecture, by Professor Marcia Langton, 5/12/01, becomes even more relevant. In it she follows the development of the thought and political understanding of Noel Pearson.

"It is the preserve of the young and idealistic -or the holy, to believe in the goodness of humanity, and, at this time, in 1995, it is clear that Noel was sufficiently optimistic about the potential for the protection of Aboriginal property rights to sound the clarion call of the only possible expression of self-determination in post-colonial Australia partnership."

Pearson argued that, "If this is to happen, (partnership) then a new meaning to the concept of self-determination must be embraced by the Nation. "In discussing this he took notice of the majority position of non-Aboriginal Australians and believed that they bore a responsibility for ensuring that a partnership was true and equal, otherwise "the erosion of legal rights, and the denial of self determination and self government, will be a sure means of driving Indigenous people inexorably towards absolute alienation."

Progressively he became disillusioned, "My concern is that reconciliation is a long way off in this country". Five years later, he had lost any remaining belief in the capacity of Australians to respond to moral and just arguments. "People believe what it is in their interest to believe", he said.

Langton concludes her discussion of Pearson's views with some of her own. "It was during this period, that, like Noel, I

### **STOP PRESS – Saturday, 11 May 2002, 8am to 6pm Bus Trip of Aboriginal Sites in the Port Stephens Area**

Ken Russell of "Let's Go Destinations" will guide us on a tour of Aboriginal sites in the Port Stephens area. The bus will leave from the university car park (near the Design Building bus stop), where you will be able to park your car for free, or catch a bus to meet us. Bring a picnic lunch to share.

There are nineteen seats available so be quick. (If there is enough interest, we can take a second bus of nineteen).

Cost: \$24. Contact Lyndall on 4969 7965 to arrange your seat on the bus.

relinquished any expectation that the Left could provide Aboriginal people with the necessary political or intellectual support, precisely because their tendency was to produce ideology for the conservation of the current state of things. ... We Aboriginal people can only rely on each other to interpret the world around us to ourselves. It will only be our own fearlessness that allows us to confront the hatred and fear that drives the various leftists and rightist views about us."

In further discussion she says that "Aboriginal fate will always be entwined with Australians who are historically and intellectually blind to difference. And our status in Aboriginal society will always remain like that of being in a secret society. Hand signs and symbols. This is the contribution of the reconciliation agenda: a permanent kind of confusion. I prefer clarity, and that will come with plain statements about the issues that count for us as long as we are denied self-determination: legal equality, freedom from racial discrimination, and full recognition of native title and customary law."

The responses of Indigenous people to the 5-point plan coupled to the bitter distrust expressed by Langton suggest that we all, and particularly those who have felt goodwill towards Indigenous struggles, need all the knowledge and insight which we can gain. The necessary abbreviation here of Langton's speech does not help in the presentation of her complex views. The speech was reported at length, although abridged, in *Overland*, 166, Autumn 2002.

*Pat Cameron*

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## NASG enhancing its role in Cultural Stomp 2002

**Saturday, 1 June 2002**

This year's Cultural Stomp will feature various exciting and new activities. Two major forums will be taking place in the Think Tent. The theme of the first forum is 'Reconciliation – Walking the talk'. The theme of the second forum is 'Debunking the myths about asylum seekers – a better model for Australia'.

Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group is organising the 'Reconciliation – Walking the talk' forum. Three nationally prominent figureheads and three local figureheads have been invited to make-up a panel of speakers to speak for 5-10 minutes on this theme. Following the panel members' presentations, the audience will be invited to ask questions and further discuss the themes. So far, Professor Henry Reynolds (author of *Why Weren't We Told?* and *An Indelible Stain?* and nationally renowned historian) has confirmed for the Reconciliation Panel.

The Main Stage will host live music and the official ceremony at dusk. The only area continuing after dark. It begins with speeches from any official guests. Candles are distributed through the crowd. A local Aboriginal Elder lights the candle and the 'flame' is then passed through event volunteer's candles to the publics representing the senior culture of the land passing a symbol of unity to all other cultures. The candles will also be used to light a labyrinth of candles. The labyrinth candles and public's candles will then burn through the rest of the evening as a vigil for all people of all cultures who suffer from ignorance and injustice.

## Jack Doherty Scholarships

In the issue of February 2001 I wrote an article mentioning the names of donors to the Jack Doherty Scholarships. Our chairperson, Dr. Jean Talbot, wrote a more detailed article in the December issue. There have however, been few donations during 2001: John Mills MLA, John McQualter (4), and Cultures in Action.

During this same year there has been the excellent initiative by Professor John Lester, beginning with the reconciliation ball, to set fund-raising for Aboriginal scholarships on a secure, permanent basis. This does not, be it understood, signal a phasing -out of the Jack Doherty Scholarships, which are a separate enterprise. But should the decline in donations to this, the Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group's long-standing appeal, continue, it does mean the scholarships will have only a few years to run. If this is so, it is a great pity.

I have been involved with the Jack Doherty scholarships since they were first mooted. They were planned with great care, and their terms have been carefully refined. It is true to say that their value is much more than the immediate financial help given to each student at the time. They are proof to Indigenous people that the white community's support goes beyond mere words. That several former students known to us, and I am sure, many others, are acquitting themselves with distinction in serving the Indigenous community, testifies to the real worth of the generous donations made over the years, most of them by individual citizens.

I begin a new paragraph to make the point therefore that in a time of cynicism and diminished caring by the wider Australian community we have here a cause which has justified every cent given, (and remember, it costs nothing to administer). If our readers near and far want to know of something which truly advances Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, then the scholarship fund established in memory of Jack Doherty is the place for your bequests, however generous or humble.

*Rodney Knock*

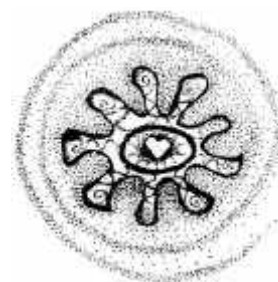
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A new feature in 2002, the Staged Tent will facilitate a more intimate performance space than the stages. The Staged Tent provides a platform for theatre as well as solo musicians, poetry readings, and spoken words.

Another new feature for Cultural Stomp is Yoga in the Park—a free beginner yoga session will take place in the early afternoon.

See you Saturday, 1 June in Civic Park.

*Deirdre Howard, Secretary*



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# Bill Reid

Billy Reid died on the 4 February 2002. As Bill Reid jnr. he was often known as Billy to distinguish him from his father who was widely known and respected for his leadership of Western NSW. Aboriginal people, beginning in 1939 with William Ferguson in Dubbo, he was unremitting until his death in Bourke, in the struggle for an independent voice for Aboriginal people, both at the local and at the national level. Reid snr. was also an artist recognised internationally for his carving of emu eggs, many of these eggs are now in the National Museum in Canberra.

Pride in Aboriginal heritage, a recognition of a need for struggle for independence and justice, the heritage of drawing and carving, were united in Billy jnr who had an intense and spiritual identification with the land where he grew up. The trees, the river and the animals of the Darling river were Reid's world, and through his drawing and painting of them he expressed his life, his beliefs and his aspirations.

Like most young Aboriginal men Bill Reid jnr. worked in many areas, throughout the state of NSW. In the 1970's he was encouraged by Professor John Cawte, (University of NSW), and Rose Ellis of the *Aboriginal Health Worker* to contribute a series of drawings which vividly illustrated both clinical and social conditions. He followed this with *Shade and Shelter*, in collaboration with Isabelle McLeod, this book

describes the resettlement of some Indigenous people from western NSW in Newcastle, as well as showing scenes of their early life. It was followed by *Billy Reid's Sore Skins*.

Dermatology Specialist, Brien Walder, in an introduction to this book says; "Skin manuals usually have color photos - of white patients. The reader will find that Billy's drawings in black and white, from Aboriginal patients, are just as clear as colour photos.

*Billy Reid's Sore Skins* is produced at low cost.—All Aboriginal health workers deserve a copy - also doctors, medical students, and those who want to possess some true art by a great Australian artist, Billy Reid."

In the 1980s Reid and his wife Barbara settled in Newcastle where he further developed his painting, particularly of the red gums and the coolibahs of his childhood on the river bank. He continued to integrate his art with his recognition of his people's need for independence and equality, working through TAFE with High School students both as a teacher of art, and as a mentor for young men.

Sadly in 1998 Reid suffered a disabling stroke, although even then supported by his wife he produced some remarkable left hand drawings, (the hand less disabled). In February, 2002 he suffered another stroke, and died on 4th. February. He is survived by his wife Barbara, and his brothers and sisters.

*Pat Cameron*



## Extracts from the Koori Mail – 20 February 2002

**Page 5** – Aboriginal people in Western Australia's remote Kimberley region this month were granted native title over a 24.725 square kilometre area, including waters. The formal settling of the claim by the Federal Court represents the first time the Commonwealth has been a party to a consent determination.

**Page 7** – Modern-day Torres Strait shares many social, legal and economic characteristics with Australia's larger mainstream metropolitan centres, but its geography, cultural history, spiritual beliefs, health status and, to a lesser extent political circumstances, are reminders of how a communal self-sufficient collective of societies has struggled under pressure to conform with Western industrial culture and now the emerging global culture.

**Page 12** – Reconciliation Australia, in conjunction with ATSIC, and the National Institute of Governance is organising a mid-year conference to "look at pressing issues such as why some indigenous communities are more successful than others in pursuing economic and social development, and what indigenous people need at community and regional level to effectively tackle issues of community dysfunction, domestic violence and welfare dependence".

**Page 14** – Aboriginal people in the Kimberley have proved that self-determination is possible, with the success of an architectural company that is operating throughout remote communities.

The NBC Aboriginal Corporation consults communities

and designs commercial and residential building. Among these are health clinics, cultural and resource centres, sobering up shelters and schools. Seventy per cent of the work is carried out on remote communities.

NBC is a benevolent corporation not solely driven by profit. Any profits are used for new projects or scholarships for employees through the resource centre.

**Page 25** – The Cobowra CDEP on the south coast of NSW has tendered for and won a contract to recycle all green waste in the Eurobodalla Shire. The shire which covers an area from Batemans Bay in the north to Narooma in the south, is the first to have negotiated a green waste recycling project with the local CDEP.

**Page 3** – The Federal and Queensland governments should put an end to the continuing disadvantage being suffered by native title claimants, ATSIC says. Chairman Geoff Clark said this was the only sensible response open to governments following the decision of the Federal Court declaring that aspects of the Queensland native title scheme are invalid.

Mr. Clark said the decision was further evidence that the Commonwealth Act did not give primacy to the rights and interest of native title holders. He said that the court's conclusion that indigenous people continue to be disadvantaged "is a total vindication of the public opposition from ATSIC and native title representative bodies to the Howard Government's 10-point plan".

*Rodney Knock*

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# Beyond Tolerance

Beyond Tolerance – A National Conference on Racism held at the Sydney Opera House on 12 and 13 March 2002 offered a timely opportunity to reflect upon where Australia needs to direct its anti-racism efforts over the next decade. Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Dr William Jonas AO, convened the conference with this objective in mind. Dr Jonas commented "This conference occurs at a time when anxieties about race and race relations in Australia are heightened and many communities are feeling alienated, unwelcome, even afraid".

The symbolic title 'Beyond Tolerance' recognised the growing concern amongst some Australians, including several people at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Community Consultation on Racism in Newcastle last year that tolerance was problematic as a concept and in practice. The clear message coming out of the national round of community consultations conducted by HREOC in the lead up to the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was "nobody wants to be tolerated". As a participant in the Orange NSW consultation succinctly put it:

*"I don't want to be tolerated. You can tolerate a headache. I want to have respect and equality."*

The Right Rev Dr Peter Hollingsworth, Governor-General Commonwealth of Australia, opened the conference calling on Australians to go beyond tolerance arguing that "racism thrives upon denial and it can easily be hidden behind a public semblance of tolerance".

Two issues arose constantly throughout the conference. The contentious, and most participants argued racist, positioning at the national political level of so-called 'boat people' seeking asylum, and the repositioning of Indigenous rights at the national political level since the Howard Government had come into power in the mid 1990s. Participants also highlighted how reconciliation had gone off the agenda; how the media only had the capacity to focus on one issue at a time (either Indigenous issues or immigration) and practiced selective reporting; and how racism was still a major problem in Australia. To demonstrate, Ms Monica Morgan (Manager, Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation) reflected on how the effectiveness of the reconciliation movement had diminished within the Indigenous community and among grass roots activists as well as the wider community. Ms Morgan also discussed how the Yorta Yorta People of the Murray region's challenge to the High Court later this year highlights the need not only for recognition but for validation of oral evidence and history in processes of justice. Ms Morgan argued that there is a "disparity between what white people call history and Indigenous people call history" and described how this had affected the Yorta Yorta peoples' land rights claim arguing that this was in effect a form of racism.

A lively panel discussion comprised of Mr Jeremy Jones (President, Executive of Australian Jewry), Ms Randa Kattan (Executive Director, Australian Arabic Communities Council), Ms Winsome Matthews (Chair, NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council) and Mr Maqsood Alshams (Honorary National Coordinator, Coalition for Justice for Refugees and Migrants) moderated by Vivianne Schenker (ABC Radio National AM) became a reflection about the portrayal of

Indigenous issues and asylum seekers in the print, radio, and television media. The panel participants disagreeing with Ms Schenker's argument that the media's portrayal of Indigenous issues and asylum-seekers was less problematic than it may have been in the past. Panel participants argued that the media lacked cultural sensitivity and passive racism was rife.

Not surprising, the Federal Government declined several invitations from Dr Jonas for a representative from the Government to participate in a panel discussion on the 'Plans and Policies of the Federal parties'. Due to airline disputes, the Democrats Senator Andrew Bartlett was unable to attend. Dr Carmen Lawrence and the recently elected Green's Federal Senator Kerrie Nettle participated.

The speech of Ms Nettle predominately focussed on asylum seekers, but briefly reflected on the Greens support for the recognition of Indigenous rights. She argued that:

*"under the current Government the mainstream ideas of multiculturalism, inclusivity, diversity and indeed modesty had suffered a blow – we've got a lot of repair work to do. The Green's believe that we need a non-discriminatory immigration policy which is based on our human rights obligation not only under international conventions but also global, social and environmental responsibilities and also recognising our need to achieve our own sustainability of social, economic and environmental matters"*.

She went on to argue that Australia needs "a comprehensive program of community education so that people can understand the causes of migration and the benefits of multiculturalism". Ms Nettle stated: "As a rich country in a global community we have the responsibility to help to provide positive solutions for social, environmental and economic problems, accepting asylum seekers is a part of this". Ms Nettle also noted that the Green's stood for "an end to mandatory detention." And, that:

*"Australia's immigration policy needed to be radically changed. ...The nature of our current policy is that it is so much easier for gaining entry into Australia if you have business connections or money than if you are a mother starving in Somalia trying to keep one of your remaining children alive. The injustice and discrimination of this policy is blindingly obvious even if perhaps not to Minister Ruddock and his party colleagues. How is it on this line of the Tasman we have a Government who seeks to win Federal election based on a xenophobic approach to asylum seekers, and yet on the other side of the Tasman in New Zealand we have a Federal Government preparing for an election there, riding at the highest point that they have ever been in the polls, who have opened their arms to Afghan asylum seekers from the Tampa. The New Zealand experience is just more proof of the Howard Government's preparedness to go to extraordinary lengths to demonise the vulnerable in our society. This Government are not just mean and tricky, they are more than mean, they are more than tricky, they are also liars"*.

In discussing Indigenous rights, Ms Nettle noted: The Greens recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the original occupants and custodians have a specific and unique cultural relationship to this country that must be respected by all Australians. We acknowledge the intrinsic Indigenous connection to the land and therefore recognise the importance of native title and land rights. We recognise the right of Indigenous people to make their own decisions

about how their land and water is used. The Greens believe that self-determination sits at the heart of being able to build a positive future for Australia where indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can work together. ... We recognise that many Indigenous organisations are already providing basic services that various levels of government provide non-Indigenous communities. The Indigenous organisations that are doing this are often doing so without any of the funding or infrastructure of government organisations to provide these services. ... The Greens are committed to redressing discrimination and inequality across all sectors of Australian society.

The Shadow Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Dr Carmen Lawrence noted that, if the Labor Party won the next election:

*"We would bring in a treaty. We will bring in a Bill of Rights for all Australians. We're going to guarantee not to litigate native title claims against Indigenous people. We will abolish mandatory sentencing. What we are going to do is*

*build the capacity of rural and remote communities as well as inner suburban communities which have suffered at least in the last few years a massive destruction through the loss of social and civil infrastructure."*

In response to a question about the inclusion of migrants and Indigenous people in the Federal parties and how party policies reflected what migrants and Indigenous people wanted, Dr Carmen Lawrence noted:

*"I've argued strongly that the representation that we have within the Liberal and Labor Party, and I would have to say the Democrats, are structurally working as nineteenth century institutions. We should have, for instance in my view, Indigenous branches of the Labour Party who are able to recruit from their own community."*

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission proposes to develop a national plan of action to combat racism as proposed at the World Conference. 'Beyond Tolerance' was the first stage in this process.

*Deirdre Howard, Secretary*



## Mabo 10 Years on

The High Court's Judgement of 3 June 1992 changed forever the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the Australian nation.

The judgement overturned the fallacy of terra nullius (land belonging to no one) and recognised native title in the common law of Australia. The High Court concluded that the notion of terra nullius was a travesty of fact and a fallacy of law. As the judges said, the notion to a large extent had been responsible for unjustifiable past dispossession, oppression and the devastation of Aboriginal people and their lives.

Eminent Australians closely involved in reconciliation and native title reflect here on developments in the decade since Mabo.

### The Historical Significance

*By Professor Henry Reynolds, historian and author*

The Mabo Judgement was seen as an historic and legal landmark when it was delivered in 1992. Ten years later it still looms over the landscape, still shadows national life. But we can look on the judgement now with an understanding of how the principles enunciated by the High Court are working through our legal and political systems.

On reflection several aspects of the Mabo case continue to reverberate. The overturning of the doctrine of terra nullius was a watershed event after which nothing could be the same again. The common law had recognised that the Indigenous nations were the original owners of Australia, that they had a form of land tenure which could be comprehended by the settler society. It meant that all Aborigines and Islanders were still landowners. And their status was not the result of European benevolence or charity.

The High Court did not grant land rights, rather it recognised that they had always existed and although native title was a particular form of land tenure it was henceforth to be given all the protection accorded to landed property by English

law. Aborigines were stakeholders whose views had to be considered and whose interests had to be taken into account.

These reflections lead us back to the judgement itself and the critical decision of the judges to extend the scope of the case from the very distinctive nature of land tenure on Murray Island (Mer) to the whole of Australia-to carry the principles of native title across the waters of the Torres Strait. Once that had been done many other decisions were bound to follow.

If native title had been there in the beginning, the onus would then lie with those who argued that it had been extinguished and when it came to pastoral leases, the Court was almost bound to find, as it did in the *Wik* Case of 1996, that an Aboriginal interest in the land had survived the impact of generations of settler activity.

### The Legal Landscape

*By Larissa Behrendt, Professor of Law and Indigenous Studies, and the Director of the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, at the University of Technology, Sydney.*

I was within the walls of a law school when I heard that the *Mabo* case had been handed down. I remember the elation I felt on hearing that the doctrine of terra nullius had been overturned. It was the same law school where I was taught that Aboriginal people had no legal title to land and where there was little mention of Indigenous issues unless in special electives that were rarely offered.

If the promise of the *Mabo* judgement has been truncated by the compromises of the *Native Title Amendment Act 1993*, and the unilateral extinguishments in the *Native Title Amendment Act 1998*, the rejection of the legal fiction that denied Indigenous sovereignty, laws and social structure remains important to Indigenous people. The symbolism has altered the legal landscape and the case has sculpted the way in which Indigenous rights are perceived. Gone is the pre-*Mabo* assumption that no Indigenous rights exist under the

# Book Review

## A book for all Australians

common law. The assertions of any kind of Indigenous right-intellectual property, heritage protection, hunting, fishing, water- has varying weight in light of the majority view.

However, the judgement gave rise to a question mark on the contemporary legal landscape. With the overturning of the document of *terra nullius*, there is now a legal fiction of 'settlement'. The High Court's refusal to address the issue that will continue to haunt not just lawyers but the whole of Australia every time issues of our nationhood arise.

I have taught in first year courses in several Universities where the first case all law students read is the *Mabo* judgement. No longer are Indigenous issues on the periphery in the way they were prior to 1992.

*From Tracks to Reconciliation, Reconciliation Australia*

## Volunteering in Indigenous Communities

Through a partnership with Australian Volunteers International, Reconciliation Australia is helping promote volunteering as a way of fostering greater cross-cultural understanding and furthering reconciliation.

Australian Volunteers International is the nation's largest and most experienced international volunteer agency. Committed to work towards a peaceful and just world, AVI provides opportunities for Australians to live, work and learn alongside people in another culture. Volunteers make a real contribution to developing communities and bring a reciprocal benefit to their own community. Since 1951 more than 5000 people have taken up the Australian Volunteer challenge in some 68 countries. AVI has recruited for 194 positions with Indigenous communities in remote locations in Australia. According to the manager of Remote Recruiting at AVI, Digby Williamson, 'if you get out there, if you live in these communities, then and only then can you begin to understand the issues which Aboriginal people have been trying to deal with for years'.

Visit [www.ozvol.org.au](http://www.ozvol.org.au) or call 03 9279 1788 or 1800 331 292 (toll free) for further information.

*From Friends and Partners in Reconciliation, Tracks to Reconciliation*



## Awabakal

In our last issue we wrote briefly about the report for 2001 of the Awabakal Co-operative. More is said in the Co-op's newsletter, *Awabakal*. There are reports on the 20 units for crisis accommodation; the two days spent by four of their young men helping Koori youth, in the 'Stay Straight' program, to keep out of the gaol system; a plea for Aboriginal carers for children age 0-14; the assault by the Awabakal Medical Service on alcohol, drugs and family violence; tips on how to look after your car; the Co-op's drug and alcohol worker; dental trainee-ships and students; the Awabakal dancers' tour; rediscovery of the language; a representative to the Adelaide Leadership Centre in November; and many items of a social, cultural or sporting nature. All in 16 colourful and interesting pages.

Definitely worth an article in the daily press or Saturday papers.

*Rodney Knock*

In *Why Weren't We Told? A personal search for the truth about our history* (Penguin Books Australia 1999), Henry Reynolds demonstrates the way in which the conflict between Europeans and the Indigenous population in Australia has been ignored in the majority of historical writings. Reynolds, himself a historian, became aware of this neglect when he took up a position as university lecturer in North Queensland in the 1960s.

Living in Townsville for the first time, he and his wife Margaret soon witnessed the division between the white population and the sizeable group of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the city. Faced with the disadvantages being suffered by the black population and made aware for the first time of their own latent racism, they began working to bring about change. With the cooperation of OPAL, (One People for Australia League) Margaret set up Kindergarten Headstart which within a year enrolled thirty children, and involved Aboriginal and Islander women in both teaching and management. During this time, the Reynolds family met Eddie Mabo, Burnam Burnam and Bobbi Sykes, who was involved with Kindergarten Headstart.

Henry began examining his own experience in school and university in his birthplace Hobart to find out what he had learnt about black and white conflict in the settlement of Australia. He discovered that text books at every level failed to deal with the subject and he felt compelled to change his historical research to find out just how the current racial division had come about and to determine what had caused this distortion of the truth.

He was to find a clue in the Boyer lectures given by W.E.H. Stanner, in 1968, which tried to explain why Australian historians had failed to address Aboriginal issues.

What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. (92)

Reynolds has challenged this cult of forgetfulness by studying primary documents and by recording oral history from those still able to remember events associated with the

## 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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opening up of land. One of his students, Noel Loos, researching the impact of European settlement on Aboriginal society in the Bowen district, revealed the blatant racism of the frontier community in many primary documents including an article from the *Port Denison Times*, June 1868, which ends with the following words. Everybody in the district is delighted with the wholesale slaughter dealt out by the native police, and thank Mr. Uhr for his energy in ridding the district of 59 myalls. (p87)

Reynolds tries to estimate the numbers of people, blacks and whites, killed in similar incidents of frontier conflict in Australia. The shocking results are presented here and Reynolds goes on to ask why we white Australians are so ready to honour those killed in battles like Gallipoli, when we do nothing to commemorate the tens of thousands of black people killed in the European seizure of the land and in the ensuing period when the settlers were determined to make their holdings secure.

Not only have the whites in Australia refused to acknowledge the conflict and the casualties that followed, they have failed to value the contribution Aborigines have made to the opening up of the land. Documents show that without Aboriginal labour, much of it paid for at minimal wages, the development of much of the land would not have occurred.

This book reveals how the first settlement began in violence and how the work of the pioneers was carried out with continuing violence. The loud denial of these facts by people, including some of our present leaders, prompts Reynolds to say, 'It seems that many Australians want to enjoy both all the benefits brought by conquest and the untroubled conscience that would spring from a peaceful settlement.' (p66, 67)

Reynolds acknowledges his critics. He takes many of their accusations and convincingly rebuffs them. Though prepared to admit that some progress has been made, his book concludes with a warning.

Many things have changed since 1965. Much has been achieved. Tolerance and understanding have broadened out. Bigotry is in retreat. But the racist past still weighs heavily on the present and might yet destroy any hope of reconciliation in this generation. Black-armband history is often distressing, but it does enable us to know and understand the incubus which burdens us all. (p257, 258)

This is a personal search for understanding. But the questions Henry Reynolds asks are also our questions if we are to understand our present society and if we are to establish our identity and place in this land. *Why Weren't We Told?* is a book all Australians should read.

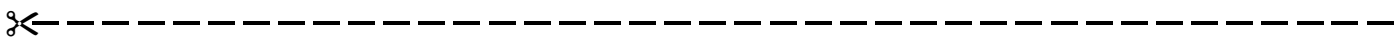
*Zeny Giles*

**Our next meeting: 6.45pm Thursday, 23 May 2002**  
**at the new Birabahn Indigenous Higher Education Centre**  
**University of Newcastle, Callaghan**

Our meeting will follow a tour of the new centre. As this will be our AGM, we encourage all members to attend and discuss the year ahead.

**Everybody** is welcome and a cuppa is provided.

To reach our meeting at Wollotuka in the new BIRABAHN BUILDING, same entrance as before, but turn left into the top car park proceed over the rise and as far as you can go, but not past the bus shelter. The building is set in the valley, walk across the elegant bridge to first floor level. Come at 6.45 pm for a grand tour of this spectacular new home for the School of Aboriginal Studies.



## 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.

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# Bits and Pieces

## Rabbit-Proof Fence

On another positive note, many of us in the Support Group in March attended an enjoyable evening of fund-raising for an Indigenous football team, when we were part of a block booking by Koombahtoo LALC for 'Rabbit-Proof Fence'. Both for the truth of the story and the skill of the actual filming we were richly rewarded. In the latest issue of *Tracks to Reconciliation*, one reads that it has been bought by "Virtually every country on earth, making the pre-sales the highest yet for an Australian film."

*Rodney Knock*

## STOP PRESS

Unfortunately, the planned bus trip to view Aboriginal cultural sites in the Port Stephens area was cancelled due to a death in the family of our tour guide, Ken Russell.

A new date has been arranged:

**Date: Saturday 11 May 2002**

**Time: 8am – 6pm**

**Cost: \$24 per person**

The bus will leave from the University of Newcastle Car Park (near the design building bus stop). Please contact Lyndall on 4969 7965 if you would like to come along.

## Annual General Meeting (AGM) Notice

Our next meeting will be our AGM. We encourage all members to attend and be part of the planning for the year ahead.

**Date: 23 May 2002**

**Time: 7:30pm**

**Place: the new Birabahn Indigenous Higher Education Centre, University of Newcastle, Callaghan**

Before the AGM our members are invited to join a tour of the new Birabahn Centre.

## Fundraiser for CULTURAL STOMP 2002

Cultures in Action Trivia Night, Thursday, 9 May at 7pm  
–Club Nova, King Street, Newcastle. \$10 per head. Great fun and great prizes.

## Acknowledgment

With our thanks to Anna Kaemmerling, Pat Cameron, Zeny Giles, Deirdre Howard and Rodney Knock for their contributions to this newsletter.

Wollotuka proudly hosts the inaugural

## Reconciliation Scholarship Ball

to be held on

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2002

6pm

at

**The Brennan Room- Shortland Union  
University of Newcastle**

All proceeds from the Ball will be donated towards  
The University of Newcastle  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarship Fund

Special Guests:

## The Donovan Bros.

Tickets: \$60.00

Students: \$40.00

(GST is included in all ticket prices)

Includes Hors d'oeuvres, 3 course dinner  
and entertainment

All tickets can be purchased from Wollotuka

Tel: (02) 4921 6863

Dress: Coat and Tie to Dinner Dress



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## Wurreker April 2002

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