

INDIGENOUS POLICY

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY

Dear Senators,

I wish to make several suggestions in relation to Indigenous self-governance and program delivery.

When the new framework is established I believe there are several points which must be strictly adhered to from the start or the entire program will fail.

1.

a. The Indigenous Committee must be compiled of Indigenous people, who are recognized as Indigenous by the majority and these committee members must have regular and close contact with the people they are to make decisions for.

b. When decisions are made they should be decided on in the Indigenous manner, ie a Council of Elders who are elected by the Indigenous constituents. We would only accept this 'Democratic Process', and I know our people would never accept a committee selected by government.

c. The Council of Elders should decide on the frequency of elections and which areas constitute seats, that description if for the European readers, in Indigenous language which areas belong to each tribe. A number of tribes could come under one tribal area and the member of that tribe would be elected by those tribes. It is quite obvious that the ideal situation would be for one committee representative for each of the 502 tribes.

d. Self Determination is the foremost objective of the Indigenous People. If Indigenous People had self determination, enabling them to make their own decisions on how they wish to live you would get much less interference with the non indigenous lifestyle. It should be up to us how such things as our Health, Education and Housing are administered, then the only people we would be able to complain about are our own. A percentage of GDP should be set aside in each budget for the Indigenous World to co exist happily and in a friendly manner with our neighbours. I would like to make the point that we don't like to be compared with the Multi Cultural society, we are not immigrants and never have been, we belong here in our land.

e. Education - Indigenous people would prefer to establish our own educational system. The Indigenous person is a very shy person, especially those who have had no or little contacts with the whites. Even though the whites are everywhere it is not difficult for our people to avoid whenever possible. Your form of education is not for us and you must realise that everything we do must have an outdoor flavour. The Aboriginal Nations have some teachers and if this system was initiated there would be ample teachers. It is quite different for our people to teach our own in comparison to teaching a multi cultural class, I don't listen to you when you say racism does not exist as I have lived through it. Our people only feel comfortable with our people.

Health - Even though the number of Indigenous doctors is currently quite small one of our main tasks would be to have Indigenous doctors as close as possible to each community.

2.

I was raised in a blacks camp (white terminology) and we have our own ways of dealing with health problems, not just the white way. This is something that our people would feel much more at ease with, especially the elders.

Housing - I belong to the Birpai community and we have only just sold a large block of land, with the Ministers permission (o for self determination), as we have twenty four families living on the street. This money will be used to house our people. We had infighting as the elders said we should never sell land, it is sacred, I agree, but with small children living in the open what else can we do, we do not have the freedom to roam anymore and permanent shelters are a 'must have' now. To overcome this problem even in our community, we would require at least sixty two more houses. Maintenance and repair to these houses would be at the discretion of the elders residing in the community.

Voting - I can speak of these things as I have had many discussions with other elders and one thing we all agree on is that it will be compulsory for us to vote in our own Indigenous elections and we would not have to vote in Non Indigenous elections. The reason for this is that it would negate the necessity for our people to come into contact with Non Indigenous people, and believe me this is something that is very important to all of us.

Law - There is the white mans law and there is our law. When on Tribal lands it would be necessary for our people to obey our laws, our forms of punishment are much more severe than white mans punishment. When our people are on white mans land they must obey the white mans law. I believe the Indigenous People in the USA have a system that when their people are arrested by white police they are returned to their own people to be tried and punished if necessary, that system would work in Australia. We have many Indigenous Lawyers and some Indigenous Police, but this would be determined by the elders as to how and if they were to be employed.

Lore - Much of our Lore has been lost over the past 200 years but many of our Elders are familiar with the relevant systems, ie the moiety systems where our people could not marry their own totem. This system was used by our people since the beginning of time and it definitely prevented interbreeding. There is much more lore that I am unable to speak about as it would be politically incorrect by our standards.

Environment - I am a Wiradjuri warrior and our most sacred place is Lake Cowal, near West Wyalong NSW, the federal minister Mr Kemp and the NSW State Premier have issued "certificates to destroy" to Barrick Gold, a Canadian gold mining company. I do not like talking about our business to all and sundry but Lake Cowal is where our God, Biamee, ascended into heaven. How would the white man feel if our people ran thru your churches, with clubs, smashing everything, not too happy about it I am sure. Well that is how we feel and Barrick Gold has already felled many of our River Red Gums that were there many decades before Cook 'discovered' Australia. Another point is that Australia currently has treaties with both China and Japan in relation to the migratory birds which fly to Lake Cowal every year. If this open cut, cyanide leaching gold mine is constructed Lake Cowal and the nearby riversystems

will be contaminated and many birds, animals, stock and possibly humans will be endangered. The Indigenous People feel that we should have outright say on what is constructed in this country, what trees are felled and what areas are off limits. For over 200 years we have had no repeat no say on what happens in our country, on our land and believe me gentlemen this is an extremely big issue with us. Our Council of Elders, which are democratically elected for a term, say four years, should have last say on what happens on our land.

Mineral Rights - If we are granted ‘Self Determination’ mineral rights on our land is something that has to be resolved immediately, if we had our way there would be no repeat no mining as it destroys nature. The Federal and State Governments have been pocketing all mineral/oil/gas/timber etc money and none has ever been allocated to our people. I repeat if we do have a say I doubt that a Council of Elders would agree to mining, tree felling, dam building etc, anything that harms the environment will not be agreed to.

f. Programme Delivery - It would be an insult for our people to have to bow and scrape and beg, if you know what I mean, to any white person for anything. As far as Programme Delivery goes it would be far better for our people to elect warriors to fill positions and administer these goods as required by our people. As far as we are concerned, the white man will never respect us so long as we have to rely on him for anything. WE WANT TO BE SELF SUFFICIENT.

g. Native Animals and Birds - This is also an extremely large problem as far as our people are concerned. The Wiradjuri Tribal Totem is the Crow and our Clan Totem is the Goanna, no problems, but what about those tribes whose totem is the Kangaroo, Emu or Koala. As far as our people are concerned these animals and birds are sacred, we must never kill or eat our totem. Take Fraser Island, off Hervey Bay in Queensland, an American tourist had his cheek nicked by a Kookaburra whilst eating a sandwich, the White authorities immediately shot fifty four Kookaburras, it so happens that the Kookaburra (googaburra) is sacred to me. It was the same for the Dingo on Fraser Island. It is imperative that the Council of Elders have a say in the final decision as to what happens in this situation.

g1. I realise Koalas are not Native to Kangaroo Island but now they are talking about the number of Koalas on Kangaroo Island, instead of the sixteen thousand the number has doubled into the thirty thousand, somebody suggested culling, I totally disagree with anything that harms animals and especially as those creatures are sacred to our people our Council of Elders should be consulted as to what action should be taken, as for the environment.

h. Government - To determine how our people are governed that decision also should be made by the Council of Elders, and I mean Elders that have been democratically elected by our people. What numbers our council of elders should consist of, Where our Aboriginal Government House is to be located. Tribal matters

will still be in the jurisdiction of the Tribal Elders, but International matters, matters concerning our White Neighbours and Non Indigenous people, or matters concerning more than one tribe should be adjudicated on by The Aboriginal Nations Council of Elders.

4.

i. Land - Land is the largest issue facing our Governments, take my tribe, the Wiradjuri, for instance, our land used to be from Hay in Western NSW to Lighgow in Eastern NSW, down to the Victorian border and North of Dubbo, today we have 34 acres, and that would be Erarnbie Mission at Cowra NSW. Recently I phoned the State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Office, Mr Refshaughe and I spoke to one of his staff as he was unavailable. I said "I am a Wiradjuri and I will be travelling between Bathurst and Hay, on what Aboriginal Lands may I camp during my journey there and return", after the staff member stopped laughing she said I don't bloody know. I never reported this event because I did not wish to jeopardise her position. If we had a reasonable amount of our own land this would never have occurred. Access to this land is to be granted by the council. I am sure that we are all aware of what happened in Northern Queensland recently when a journalist was arrested for entering enclosed lands without permission and the court set him free without fine, conviction or incarceration. Our people would not look upon this action as insignificant, laws have to be introduced to prevent such things happening in future to the privacy of Indigenous People, just as we would not come into your home uninvited.

j. Complaints - I realise that there is much dishonesty today, and as you have said, any complaints must be raised with the accused. I am a Wiradjuri and I will tell you that there is a particular family within our Tribe who have become extremely rich. This family has many contacts, ie NSWALC, ATSIC, Non Indigenous Governments etc. and members of their family received honours from the white community. If each Tribe had their own council of elders and I can assure you that none of this family would be elected to a Council. They have been untouchable due to their circle of powerful friends, but under the suggested system of government their circle of powerful friends would cease to exist.

k. Custom/Heritage - Recently a policeman told a group of female elders near Alice Springs that they were indecent and they must move on. They were practicing a corroboree for a forthcoming Aboriginal Function and as far as they were concerned they were not harming anybody. Apparently someone had complained to the police and the police took immediate action to rectify the problem. 200 years ago this would not have been a problem and the Non Indigenous world has got to realise how long our people have been here and that we have our own Customs. If we had our own areas, how we acted on them would be decided by the Council of Elders. The same problems exist in NSW in relation to the fishing laws. In Northern Queensland, Murandoo Yanner was arrested for catching a crocodile, his favourite food. After this matter was adjudicated on in the High Court, Yanner was released as he was not breaking his traditional law. Yanner immediately caught two crocodiles and called by the police station and invited them to his BBQ, they declined.

5.

2.

Dear Senators, for happiness and a feeling of equality to prevail in this country of ours the following problems must be dealt with:

- a. Dispossession of Land/Land Returned
- b. Sovereignty
- c. Self Determination
- d. Self Governance
- e. Own Doctors/Nurses
- f. Own Police
- g. Own Lawyers
- h. Own Law
- i. Own Lore
- j. Own land and water - Protected
- k. Protection for our animals and birds
- l. Our own media outlets ie radio and tv

That is correct Senators, we must be SELF SUFFICIENT in every way and then we will cease to be an encumbrance on your people. It was stated by a politician that “anything that is legalised by legislation can be illegalised by legislation. Any action by the Senate Committee must be legislated in such a way and included in a new constitution so people like the current Prime Minister cannot play havoc with our lives ever again.

Yours truly,

Ronald Terence Gannon