



**SUBMISSION**  
**TO**  
**SENATE RECONCILIATION ENQUIRY**

The Secretariat  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Room S1.61, Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

From

Kate Oldaker  
Whitehorse AnTAR  
4 Fuchsia Street  
Blackburn 3130  
Phone: 03 9894 1235

## PREAMBLE

Reconciliation has failed to advance since the advent of the Howard government in 1996. There are many factors but the greatest impediment to reconciliation has been the uncaring attitude towards the indigenous people. Set out below are some of the issues with which this cynical attitude has thwarted any real progress.

## NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT ACT 1998

This was perhaps the greatest setback to any progress. For a government which had come to office claiming to represent all Australians, to claim that legislation AGAINST the spirit of the original Native Title Act could be acceptable as a mere amendment is a travesty of the legislative system. Mr. Fischer summed up the attitude accurately when he described it as delivering 'bucketloads of extinguishment.'

## APOLOGY OR JUSTICE TO THE STOLEN GENERATION

Mr. Howard has shown no compassion whatever for the suffering of the Aboriginal people. He is fortunate that he has been dealing with such a gentle people. To spend large sums of money fighting their just claims right to the High Court indicates the level of contempt with which he holds their genuine desire for redress for some of the wrongs perpetrated upon them. Given the level of his lack of caring, he is correct not to say 'sorry' on behalf of his government. He is obviously very happy with the benefits we inherited by way of dispossession. He certainly doesn't feel sorry.

## PRACTICAL RECONCILIATION

The Howard government's claim to provide practical assistance by way of their contribution to reconciliation, is on about the same level as the 'economic level playing field' so dear to the hearts of the economic fundamentalists of the 80's. The philosophy behind this claim is that the rich countries can receive the same assistance as the poor countries, the poor Australian can compete for education, employment and housing with the affluent, and the middle classes in the leafy affluent suburbs can receive the same assistance as the workpoor and unemployed.

## TREATY

The refusal to consider a treaty with the indigenous people on the ground that treaties can only be made between sovereign States overlooks the many treaties made by other countries such as Canada and New Zealand with their indigenous people.

## RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

It would appear that the Howard government may be considering transferring responsibility for reconciliation to Reconciliation Australia. This would be most inappropriate as this body is not set up for such major endeavour.

If this is the government's intention, it would show an abrogation of its clear responsibility to the Aboriginal people.

Besides this, only the government has the power of legislation and access to the required adequate funding.

## RECONCILIATION PLACE

There are many instances of injustice by the government to indigenous people, but to have erected this so-called monument and then included the happy laughter of playing children, representing the stolen generation, beggars belief. That this part of the plan was discontinued, does not alter the fact that the insult was delivered. The misery of children taken from their families to be depicted as laughing and happy is on a par with the demonisation of the boat people and the lie of the 'children overboard' affair.

## SUMMARY

The Howard government has made no progress towards reconciliation. By its cynical behaviour in enacting the Native Title amendment to destroy native title, and to erect a monument telling the opposite of the truth shows a contempt for the people to whom we owe so much for having dispossessed them of their land, and waged war and destruction on a defenceless people.

One of our cartoonists (I forget which one) several years ago, summarised the situation brilliantly when he had a white Australian say to an Aborigine, "Sorry about the stolen generation, but thanks for the real estate." History will not be kind to the Howard government for the disgraceful treatment of the our First Peoples.

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Kate Oldaker

