

02 4471 7624

1

Eurobodalla Walking Together Group

(Australians for Social Justice & Reconciliation: Batemans Bay - Moruya - Narooma)

Member of the New South Wales Reconciliation Council

c/- HUGH SOUTHON, 54 Burri Point Road, Guerilla Bay, NSW 2536, AUSTRALIA.

Ph/fx: +61 (0)2.4471.7624. email southonh@acr.net.au

2.12.02

The Secretary,
Senate Legal & Constitutional Committee,
Parliament House,
Canberra.

Fx: 02 6277 5794.

Senate Reconciliation Inquiry.

Dear Secretary,

Following our discussion on 15.11.02 this submission is made to the Senate Reconciliation Inquiry on behalf of the Eurobodalla Walking Together Group. The Eurobodalla Walking Together Group was established in 1993 as part of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's 'Australians for Reconciliation project. Since then it has functioned as a community group dedicated to social justice and reconciliation, without outside funding but benefitting from the basic infrastructure provided by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation until the end of 2000. From the start Kooris have been members and there have been working partnerships with local aboriginal land councils and other aboriginal community groups, with the Eurobodalla Shire Council and its Aboriginal Development Officer. EWTG contributed to the program of activities of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation including the community consultations that led to the preparation of the Final Report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the declaration of Reconciliation and the 'Roadmap for Reconciliation'. Currently the EWTG is a member of the NSW Reconciliation Council and the writer has served as a member of the Board of the Council in 2001-2.

In common with other local reconciliation groups, the Eurobodalla Walking Together Group has experienced what Dr W Jonas described as the difficulty in identifying *'any public material that demonstrates that the federal government has engaged in a good faith process to consider the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's recommendations...'* (Press Release 15.5.02). In particular we have been very disappointed at the absence of a formal process designed to carry the nation forward on the path established by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation from its inception with all-party support in 1991.

We believe that our recommendations respond to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and we make them from the perspective of a community group that has been engaged with the issues of social justice and reconciliation in Eurobodalla Shire for a number of years.

924

02 4471 7624

2

1. There should be concerted action on the 'Roadmap for Reconciliation'.

'The 'Roadmap for Reconciliation' represents the most succinct expression of the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation over a substantial period of years with widespread consultation with both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. As the document says it contains four strategies which *'set out the most important actions for individuals, communities, organizations, and governments... to transform our commitment to reconciliation into action'*. Experience in our community suggests that real and evident achievement of such actions will contribute very more to a sense that progress is being made than the symbolic action 'placing reconciliation at the heart of the national capital' by the creation of a Reconciliation Place in the Parliamentary. Many may see the latter as cynical at the best.

2. Emphasis on local and community action.

We believe that an emphasis on community engagement is important in ensuring that local issues are realistically taken into account in carrying out the recommended actions. Local social justice and reconciliation groups have in the past, and should in the future, make a significant role contribution to the community changes that are called for in the 'Roadmap for Reconciliation'. Building on the network of Local Reconciliation Groups would be valuable in using the Peoples' Movement and its links with aboriginal community in a very positive way.

3. Check with aboriginal communities on priorities of local issues.

While the recommendations of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation resulted from widespread community consultation, they have necessarily been framed in national terms. Local needs and priorities should also be consulted to ensure that they are reflected in the actions taken and to ensure that the local indigenous communities identify with them rather than seeing them as imposed from outside. In addition only a focussed and careful local approach will allow sensitive local issues (such as 'law & order' where much of the discussion may be indirect) to be approached realistically.

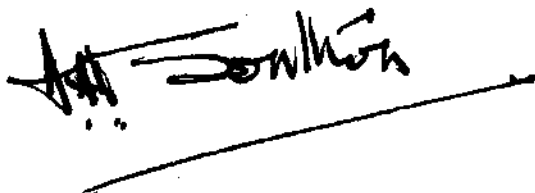
4. Urgent not to lose momentum eg in the light of other community issues.

The time that has elapsed since the presentation of Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's Report coupled with the governments very slow responses has already led to much loss of momentum and enthusiasm within the community.. In Eurobodalla there have been reports of the discontinuance of valuable community arts events for the lack of supporters from the indigenous and non-indigenous communities to maintain them. This applies also to local social justice and reconciliation groups.

5. Have measures of change to allow for auditing including at community level.

Auditing of progress in attaining the aims of the 'Roadmap for Reconciliation' is important and must be consistent with the experience of indigenous communities themselves. A local focus is likely to be more immediately relevant and provide a basis for more direct community comment and debate than a distant *'regular report against key indicators of indigenous disadvantage'* commissioned by COAG (Commonwealth Government Response to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Final Report, September 2002, Executive Summary, p. 3). Many communities might experience considerable difficulty in relating such an auditing process to their day-to-day concerns.

Hugh Southon, Convenor,



925