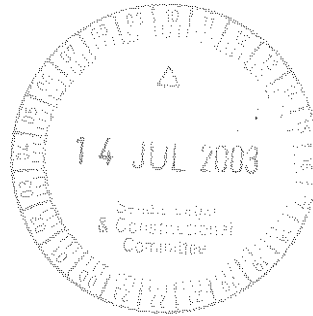


Premier of Victoria

10 JUL 2003



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Senator Nick Bolkus
Chair
Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Bolkus

INQUIRY INTO PROGRESS TOWARDS NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Thank you for the invitation, in your letter dated 29 May 2003, to the Victorian Government to make a submission to the Legal and Constitutional References Committee's inquiry into progress towards national reconciliation.

My Government's vision for reconciliation is to create a society that:

- is proud of its Indigenous heritage;
- addresses the disadvantage and dispossession experienced by Indigenous Victorians;
- heals the hurt of past injustices; and
- commits to building a positive future.

Since 1999 the Victorian Government has been actively pursuing and promoting reconciliation through a broad range of activities and initiatives, both symbolic and material. In essence we believe the way forward requires a new approach that involves Aboriginal people defining their own issues and aspirations and working closely with Government to develop solutions. Government action to advance reconciliation needs to be responsive to these community-identified needs and should support community processes, build community capacity and develop Indigenous leadership.

For the information of the Committee I enclose a copy of the first Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report, covering the period November 1999 to October 2002. The Report outlines the range of mechanisms my Government has put in place to involve Indigenous Victorians in policy, strategy development and planning and the initiatives that have flowed from these mechanisms. The Report is



part of our commitment to publicly report annually on progress in Indigenous affairs and provides a detailed account of the initiatives and expenditure of the Victorian Government in pursuit of reconciliation.

Since October 2002 we have continued to progress the reconciliation agenda. Our election commitments last year included additional funding to 2006-07 for Indigenous community capacity building and leadership (\$3M), Indigenous business development (\$3.75M), and maternity services for Indigenous mothers (\$1M). We also provided \$0.5M for an Indigenous commemorative place in Victoria, the nature and location to be determined by the Indigenous community.

On National Sorry Day this year the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Gavin Jennings MLC, released the report of a Government-appointed Indigenous taskforce. The report recommends a governance and service delivery model for an organisation in Victoria devoted to addressing the needs of Indigenous Victorian children who were removed from their families and culture. The organisation is a \$2.1M commitment to improve services to members of the stolen generation and a sign of my Government's readiness to address the impact of past policies, in addition to developing more appropriate policy and service models oriented around the aspirations of Indigenous Victorians.

I hope this information is useful to the Committee and I wish you well with your inquiry.

Yours sincerely



HON STEVE BRACKS MP
Premier of Victoria