

**Speech by Fred Chaney
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National Press Club
4 July 2007**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the National Press Club is situated, the Ngamberi Ngunnawal people who are represented here today by Matilda House. Thank you Matilda for being here with us today.

It is an honour to be sharing the microphone with Tom Calma, a man who works tirelessly and bravely for the good of his people, and of Australia as a whole. The Social Justice Report produced each year by Tom and his team is a remarkable piece of work.

This year, once again, the report offers an invaluable, intellectually rigorous critique of where the rubber hits the road in Indigenous policy implementation – it deserves all the attention it gets, and more.

Tom and I chose to speak together here today, not because HREOC and Reconciliation Australia necessarily see everything about the Government's program in the same way. Tom and I don't have see everything in the same way to be useful contributors. But in this business we all need to listen carefully to each other, including to our critics, because critics often have valuable things to say. As the PM has usefully said, the Government will make mistakes. Identification of those mistakes should not be seen as offensive.

Fifteen minutes is not a lot of time. And for this reason, I will be speaking to you very directly this afternoon. If people want to look at the multitude of reports that underpin my thinking, I'll provide the references – the most recent and, I think, very convincing and helpful being the report of Pat Anderson and Rex Wild that set the scene for the Government's actions a fortnight ago.

I've been in this game for a very long time. I've overseen as many disappointments as every other Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I know this is not easy.

But the message I want to deliver to you here today is that the answers, while complex, are now known. And that means the this Government and State and Territory governments, and all of us involved, have no excuses left for failure.

Both the issues and the remedies are captured in the Anderson/Wild Report. They sit with perfect consistency alongside the views set out by Productivity Commissioner Gary Banks in his speech last week in Istanbul to the Second OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy. And in another presented to the Cape York Institute Conference by Ken Henry, head of the Federal Treasury.

They reflect all the findings of research Reconciliation Australia and the ANU have been conducting around the ingredients of effective Indigenous governance. Similar findings to those documented by researchers in the United States and Canada and elsewhere when they've looked deeply for actual evidence of what works in overturning disadvantage in Indigenous communities.

We're at a point where the Australian Government has started something big that it must now see through.

And it means that we in the community sector and you in the media need to sustain our scrutiny over the long term. Our objective must go beyond making the cowering child safe. That is an immediate priority, as it should be and as it has been for a very long time.

But we have all the tools we need to be striving for much more than that.

This is an important point that's been bubbling away over the last few days – sometimes explicitly, more often cautiously and very much constrained by uncertainty about the dollars the general community is prepared to invest in this. The Treasurers, State and Federal, are the invisible gorillas at the table.

It is no coincidence that this opportunity presents itself on the 40th anniversary of the referendum that saw 90% of Australians in favour of equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fellow citizens.

From all that I see in my various roles, from all that I hear and read, I have no hesitation in saying that Australians of today want no less.

They will tolerate extra spending when they are confident that it will yield results. When stories of despair are balanced with stories of hope and success. When policy is based on evidence of what works.

The Aboriginal communities currently in the frame, desperately needy communities, will work with government if they are provided with this vision of success. Civil order is a prerequisite for a community to be healthy, happy and successful. But so too is hope.

Which leaves us with a whole lot of things this afternoon about which there is no contest:

- A need for urgent action.
- An acceptance that protection of children by itself is not a solution and if that's all we get, we might as well prepare ourselves for the next crisis report, and the next shocked Minister.
- An actual solution involves long term, properly resourced action - across governments and across ministers and across all the interrelated aspects of disadvantage, just as Anderson/Wild identify.

There is really no contest either about the fundamental importance of Indigenous engagement as a prerequisite for success – this is what reconciliation is all about these days – building the respectful partnerships that underpin every example of success we have at our disposal, locally and around the world.

Let's be upfront and learn from our mistakes - centralised, imposed programs delivered from Canberra or state/territory capitals have not delivered the success we must now expect.

There is also no contest on the need for clarity, sooner rather than later, about the Government's wider intentions.

It is regrettable that so many Australians view the Government's intervention as election driven. Reconciliation Australia must believe and respond on the basis that the Government is sincere and is motivated in the same way that we are, as I am, on the basis that every Aboriginal child is as precious as my grandchildren.

They will be judged, in the short term as well as the long term, on the extent to which their initial intervention is backed by a comprehensive, national commitment to deal with social circumstances which underlie the horrors of sexual violence.

We all need to be coldly realistic about this, the Prime Minister and Minister included, and accept government has limited immediate capacity to even take this first step. Clearly they have not yet thought through detailed interventions but at least the Government has grasped the nettle of intervention and accepted the responsibility to improve conditions for fellow Australians living this horror.

This is the big change over the last couple of weeks, the positive change that Reconciliation Australia fully endorses.

We agree to the drastic need to ensure civil order and child protection and hope the governments of Australia can deliver on this first step as soon as possible. We know (not just think) that after that if we are not to recycle this horror story in 2 or 3 years time, all governments must work together - with the communities

But the question now, and many people have been asking this question to government ministers, is about the way forward from here.

Reconciliation Australia's simple message today, as it has been for several years now, is that government knows the way forward. And we know they know because the answers are presented in reports they have commissioned, in the words their operatives repeat, almost word for word, in every serious address on the subject.

We must not dismiss what we've learned from the last 30 years of largely failed policy in this area, just because it offends someone's ideology. It's time to adopt and stick to evidence based, fact based approaches.

It's easy to pigeon hole some people by suggesting they are part of a failed past and failed ideology. Ok, well let's turn to the learnings as expressed by the head of the Prime Minister's Department, Peter Shergold, by Gary Banks, by Ken Henry.

Take the Productivity Commission and COAG's key indicators as a guide or a baseline – there's no ideology there - and laid out for us are all the principles, all the tools, which show us where to from here.

Over the past several months, I've been invited to deliver and redeliver in many different settings a speech about the incoherence of government policy in Indigenous affairs.

The two key factors I identify are these:

- A refusal across all governments to face up to the real cost of meeting current and future needs - the invisible gorilla at all the government and agency talkfests which is conveniently hidden behind the (sadly effective) political line that you can't solve these problems by throwing money at them. It is true, you can't solve them by throwing money because you also need sound policy and effective administration to use the necessary extra funding well. But there are big deficits and they cost money to fix.

And

- The "start again" syndrome which affects almost every new government and Minister. Rather than build on areas of success we reorganise. What better way to avoid responsibility now than by damning the past, reorganising, and cherish the thought that continuing failure will not be apparent until you have departed

I've been a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and I've know all of the others over nearly 40 years. I, like them, have been disappointed at how little was achieved of the things I set out to do.

But over those years, a great deal has been learned about what works in delivering better outcomes on the ground, in education, employment, health and housing.

If we don't start to apply those learnings, we'll continue starting from scratch with every new Minister.

Put simply last week by Gary Banks in his speech to the OECD, every serious analysis of what works has four factors in common:

1. Cooperative approaches between Indigenous people, government and the private sector.
2. Community involvement in program design and decision making – a bottom up rather than top down approach.
3. Good governance, and
4. Ongoing government support – human as well as financial.

So let's take those points one at a time – and remember these same points are made if you care to look up Ken Henry's speech from the recent Cape York Institute conference, they're in the Anderson/Wild Report, Tom's Social Justice Report and they're explained at some length in the latest report of Reconciliation Australia's Indigenous Community Governance Research Program.

On the point about partnerships between Indigenous people, governments and others – the first big challenge is building trust. If the wider community is cynical about governments' sincerity, it's not hard to understand the doubt and fear, even anger, expressed by Indigenous people.

To allay those fears, and deliver on Gary Banks' formula, the new way of doing things has to be better than the old way. Trust is only built through consistency and commitment.

The same radical change is needed to deliver on his second point about giving communities real decision-making power. That doesn't mean, as has so often happened in the past, flying into communities to tell them what's going to happen.

The point Gary makes about good governance is significant because what it means is that governments actually need to support communities to develop the kind of leadership and structures needed if those communities are to engage with government in the way government, and others, require. For example, to negotiate shared responsibility arrangements.

And then we come to the invisible gorilla – the resources, human and financial. Delivering results on the basis of what we know actually works will cost more money – education results require more teachers, in some cases better teachers, healthy families require government to address a huge deficit in housing and endless reliance on fly-in fly-out services for quite large communities. It means the right facilities and the right personnel on the ground.

But how can we say Australia is well-governed if we don't provide adequate housing and adequate education to our children.

The critical message in all of the reports we need to be informed by now is this:

All progress is local. Important as such initiatives are in assisting a limited number of Indigenous children, there's no use romancing that we can educate

all of these children at private boarding schools when the reality is that the vast majority will be educated in local state schools. The quality of those schools and the support they receive from government is critical.

Real jobs must be available in substantial Aboriginal communities. We need to stop using a work for the dole scheme to deliver services, and start offering people full time employment to provide basic services as is the case in every other Australian community.

It's time we stopped complaining about people not joining the real economy if we don't extend to their town the real jobs paid for by government everywhere else.

What we need to see from government is the commitment to develop, fund and maintain a national framework which provides long term support for locally driven solutions, cross party, cross minister, cross government.

The framework for a top-down, bottom-up knit.

No single government or Minister, no matter how long they last, can carry this on their own. But what this Government can do is confirm it as national objective and set the framework for it to receive the requisite national support over decades.

And nothing keeps governments honest like having significant Australians, recognised experts of independent status and stature taking responsibility for driving this plan, including some private sector surveillance.

Alongside Sue Gordon's taskforce, we need to draw together the best and brightest of people to build and lay out this framework. People from business, from mining and banking, and importantly Indigenous people who have the skill and the relationships to make an essential contribution to this effort.

Indigenous men and women who provide role models to their people and a stark lesson to anyone who believes, let alone perpetuates, devastating stereotypes.

We've used this taskforce model to craft solutions in other complex policy areas like taxation, financial systems reform and most recently the emissions trading scheme. It can work if the political will is there, and the money.

This is the time, a time of unprecedented prosperity when we have tens of billions of dollars of Government surpluses and the sale of public assets.

Surely we can commit to dealing with this matter once and for all.