

I wish to make a submission on the Truth and Justice Commission Bill 2024 to aid the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

This is a personal submission, I represent no groups, I write only as a citizen of Australia.

In the spirit of the First Peoples of our country I will say where I am from, who I am. I am an old white man. I was born in England but have lived in Australia for close on 70 years. Sometime in early adulthood I sought and gained citizenship of Australia.

Many years ago I was musing with someone about the issues confronting our country. I suggested that the most important of these issues was coming to terms with the nation's relationship with its First Peoples (I would probably have said "indigenous people" back then or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders). And yet despite the importance to me I didn't know what I wanted to happen, what action should be taken on this issue. I had a pretty good idea what I believed and the actions I wanted on all sorts of other issues but I was lost as to my mind about First Peoples.

I knew I felt a harm had been done, many harms were being done. I also felt a great sense of loss. Many of these feelings were crystallized in reading the essays of W.E.H. Stanner. But I still didn't know my mind as to what should be done about this harm.

And then I read the Uluru Statement from the Heart and knew what was needed, in large part because it was what was wanted by First Peoples.

From what little interaction I have had with First Peoples, people for whom the local community is all important, I was in awe of the enormous effort that must have gone into the creation of this Australia-wide statement.

I found the statement to be first of all so generous in approaching we other Australians.

I saw its program of actions as immensely valuable in creating a better Australia.

And I have watched as that generosity, that foresightedness, that constructiveness dissipate as the politics of Australia took hold.

This Bill remains of the good spirit gathered at Uluru. Let us not throw it away. A Truth and Justice Commission will provide a national gathering of information, ideas, testimony to allow us to move forward. For me it will elaborate and hopefully provide understanding of what at the moment I simply feel as harms. It can do this for the nation as a whole.

How could we not want truth and justice, not want to examine the past and talk of the future? Are we really so afraid of conflict, hard discussions, struggle that we forgo this chance at understanding?

Michael Wood  
31/8/2024