

Committee Secretary

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee

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Parliamentary Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy

, Keith John Dwyer, wish to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy.

I am a fourth generation Anglo-Celtic Australian who has enjoyed the benefits of being born many years ago into the robust democracy that is Australia. I share this country with an ever increasing number of people from different cultures who, in the words of a popular song, now call Australia home.

My university study and working life that now spans almost 70 years has led me to appreciate that I am living in a country that was taken by force from its original inhabitants. Our history is one of great achievement but it is also one of brutal repression and attempted genocide. Our ancestors were engaged in an amoral and well documented process to acquire land and resources. As a young teacher in the provisional school at Bedourie in Queensland, many years ago, I was horrified to read letters collected by the then Shire Clerk that casually referenced murdering indigenous people by clubbing them to death with stirrup irons as sport. My interest in the place of the indigenous people was sparked. This interest was developed through conversations with my late mother who told of indigenous people camping “down by the creek” at a property in Samford in Queensland where she grew up and by my role as a liaison person with indigenous groups while I was a District Inspector with the Queensland Education Department in the Wide Bay Region. I read with interest the Uluru Statement from the Heart and acknowledge it as a vital document in the Australia of today. The wonder and power of this document

is its invitation for all of us non-indigenous citizens of Australia to walk forward with the indigenous people.

We need to recognize the position of our first inhabitants.

We need to recognize their sovereignty of this land.

We need to acknowledge the brutality with which Australia's first inhabitants were treated.

We need to recognize the consequences of the actions of the past as they impinge negatively on the indigenous people of today.

The Uluru Statement generously invites non-indigenous Australian to become one with the original inhabitants. It proposes a truth-telling commission to acknowledge the injustices of the past, the effects of which are still being felt at the moment. It proposes, in broad outline, a process by which indigenous people can be fully consulted in legislation that relates to them. I totally support these ideas.

In a world of "strong leaders", with democratic institutions under threat in many countries in the world, now is the time to act. As a country we need to accept the invitation set out in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. All Australians need to walk together and to glory in being part of the oldest continuous community of people in the world. An acceptance of the invitation given by the Uluru Statement would strengthen Australia's democratic processes and show that we, as a people, are not prepared to accept the very much second best of party political policies.

I believe Australia has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to right a significant wrong and to set itself on the path of true social cohesion.

You have the power to do something. Please don't let this opportunity slip through your hands.

Yours sincerely

Keith John Dwyer