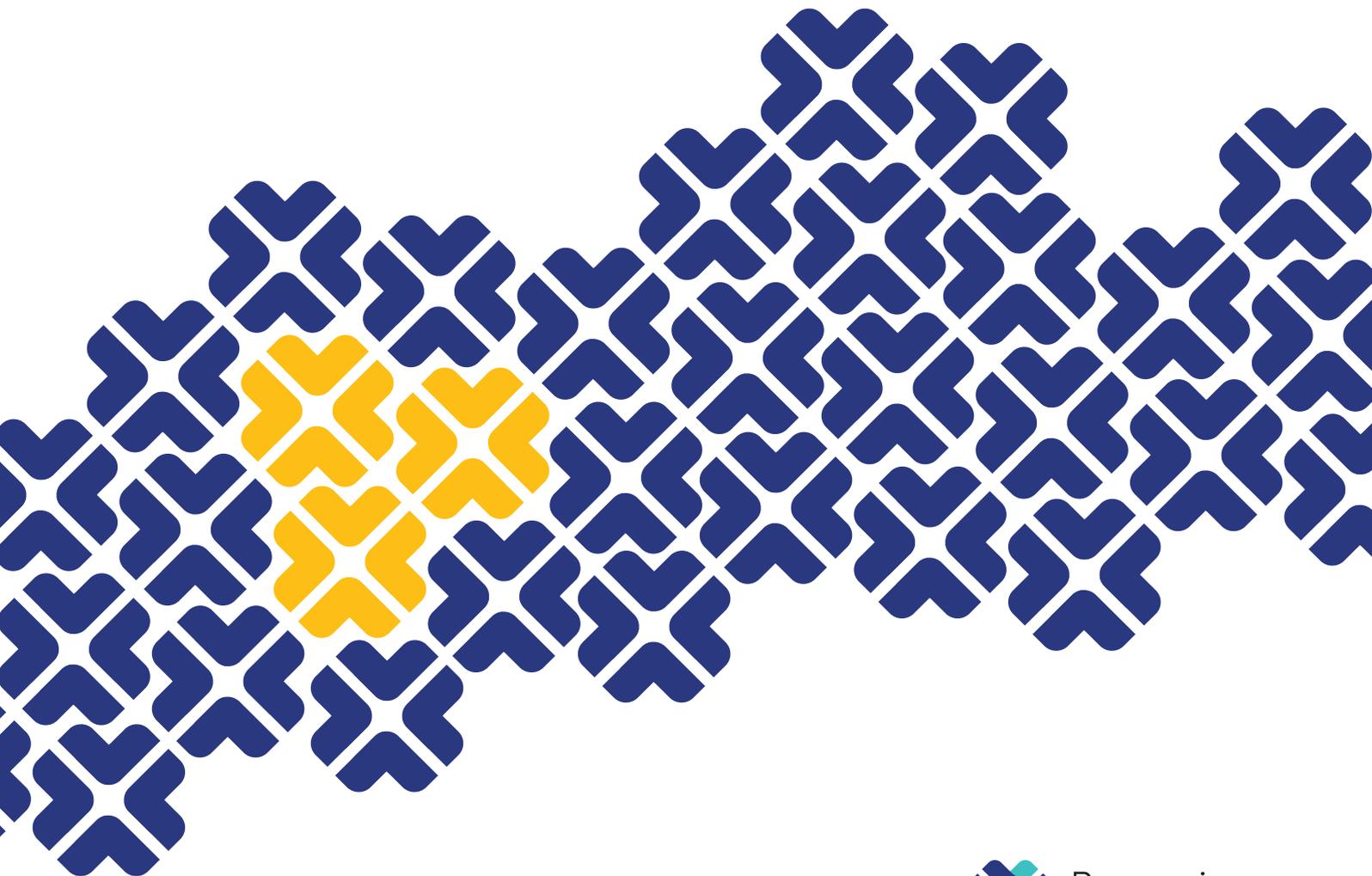


Whose truth?

The official position of Recognise a Better Way
The Voice No Case Committee

July 2023



A vote for the Voice is a vote for Voice, Treaty, and ‘Truth’.

In his victory speech of May 2022 **Prime Minister Albanese** said,

‘I commit to the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full.’

There are three parts to this commitment – Voice, Treaty, and Truth. The Australian electorate must understand that a vote for the Voice is a vote for Voice, Treaty, and Truth.

Recognise a Better Way, like most Australians, has a deep sympathy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We understand their desire for recognition and to help those who are in need.

Our concern is that the Prime Minister’s proposals as set out in the Uluru statement make the form of recognition far too political and do not address need.

We think there is a better way, and our path is set out at the end of this paper, which is the third of three on the Uluru Statement.

What is truth telling?

A Makarrata Commission is to be part of the machinery to achieve the Prime Minister’s Uluru agenda.

Among other things it would ‘supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about Aboriginal history’.

Such a Commission would have no pretensions to independence or objectivity. It would be staffed by proponents of the Uluru statement and vigorously pursue the Voice, Treaty and Truth agendas.





The Voice is a shadow government proposed by the Calma-Langton model.

The Treaty is not a credible way to manage relations between Australians. It would act as a beacon of historic complaint and an instrument for constant retribution and redistribution against most Australians by a minority of Australians.

The cost to Australia would be in the tens of millions of dollars. More important, the monies would go to distant descendants of those allegedly wronged. This is no way to promote reconciliation.

There is no doubt about the cruel manner in which many Aborigines were treated in the distant past. Here is an extract from a report of the Royal Commission into the Condition of the Natives to the government of Western Australia in 1905.

Though the Comptroller General of Prisons has no legal authority for using neck-chains at all ... he has nevertheless given instructions for

their employment in the case of natives ... Except in times of sickness the prisoner is neck-chained from the time he comes into gaol until the day he leaves, sometimes from two to three years.

These and many other cruel practices and events are on the record. The question is whether any positive purpose is served in knowing what is already known.

There is no different truth to be had. The Prime Minister accuses those opposing Uluru of wanting to reopen what he calls the 'culture' or 'history' wars, yet he supports a mechanism that intends to precisely do that.

His accusation is a device to stop versions of the truth being broadcast that Yes supporters disapprove. It seems that in reality, the actual living conditions of people in trouble now, matters little to the 'Yes' camp.

The contest of ideas is often about power, and the most powerful 'story' or 'narrative' can sometimes overcome objective truth. If the narrative suggests that the woes



of Aboriginal people stem from an ‘invasion’ or that some people are forever ‘different’ then facts do not seem to matter.

The fact is that woes are limited to a subset of Aboriginal people, those who have failed to adapt to their circumstances.

The fact is that most Aboriginal people are doing about as well as other Australians.

The narrative pressed by the Albanese government and supporters of the Uluru package shows no interest in the lives of those struggling to adapt to their circumstances.

These supporters show no interest in the fact that their own journey carries the lessons of successful adaptation for all Aboriginal people.

Their narrative feeds the fires of retribution, it smothers truth.

Noel Pearson says that ‘a whole generation of indigenous leadership will have failed’ if the Voice is not successful.

It would be more accurate to say that a whole generation of

Aboriginal leaders has failed by proposing a shadow government for one very small constituency.

This grab for power is the last play of a leadership that sits on the shoulders of those pioneers among Aboriginal leaders who fought for and won equality.

Pearson has declared that he will ‘fall silent’ if the Voice fails. This is a promise that must be kept.

Australia has had enough of the special pleading, it is time to dismantle the voices of arrogance and return to the hard task of helping those in need, not an Aboriginal elite to the spoils of Canberra.

The democratic system must not be assaulted by Voice, Treaty and ‘Truth’ simply because a claimant fails to receive satisfaction.

Aboriginal leaders have vastly overplayed their hand. It is time to cease the war against history and Australian society.







Is anything new likely to emerge from truth telling?

Typical of the 'truth' ploy is the Yoorrook Justice Commission in Victoria. It has been established to inquire into 'the relationship between historical injustices and ongoing systemic injustices' of 'First Peoples'.

Note the desire to link history and contemporary woes. A moment's reflection would give the lie to this connection.

Most Aboriginal people are doing well, history was not their enemy.

Blaming history, when most have moved on from their past, and none live as their forebears, is a cruel device bound to trap the poor in their unenviable circumstances.

Finding a path to a better life is the only sensible thing to do, retelling history from a 'different' perspective is unlikely to light the path.

Aboriginal people have had many opportunities to tell their truth, to be heard. On each occasion governments have responded, not always as claimants would want, but in ways that reflected what was known, and acceptable to the electorates that elected them.

The most recent opportunity for truth telling was the 2018 Joint Select Committee of the Australian Parliament on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, which heard stories from Aborigines about truth-telling.

At that committee **Aboriginal people had a voice; they told their truth.**

Perhaps more significant was that although the Joint Select Committee was asked to consider the work of several earlier committees - the Expert Panel, the former Joint Select Committee, the Statement from the Heart and the Referendum Council - the Statement from the Heart alone brought a new element, The Voice, into the debate.

As Senator Pat Dodson (Labor) and Julian Leeser MP (Liberal) wrote in their final report, 'The rejection of all previous proposals was a shame because there were previous proposals which would command broad political support; but we acknowledge that at Uluru they seem to have been taken off the table.'

Truth telling inevitably ends in politics, in this case big new political devices - The Voice and Treaty - were thrown into the arena.

When the only truth allowed is one of difference and historic wrongs the 'remedies' that are produced serve to accentuate differences and focus on the past.

Nevertheless, there have been many inquiries in the last

three decades in which Aboriginal people have been given, and have taken, the opportunity to tell their truth.

Between 1991 and 2000 three major inquiries provided opportunities for truth telling. These were The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (1997), and The Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission (1997).

The inquiries were extensive, the recommendations wide ranging and mostly implemented.

Following these major inquiries came five inquiries undertaken into Aboriginal child sexual abuse. In 1999, Aboriginal academic Boni Robertson led an Inquiry into child sexual abuse in Queensland.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence was established following a meeting of 400 women at Parliament House, Brisbane, to discuss 'the epidemic of alcohol-related violence against women and children'.

The ATSI Women's Task Force on Violence consisted of 50 Indigenous women. Aborigines had a voice; they told their truth.

In 2002, Aboriginal magistrate Sue Gordon led an Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities in Western Australia.

The inquiry visited 44 communities and invited 400 Aboriginal organisations and communities to participate.

Aboriginal people had a voice; they told their truth.

In 2006, Aboriginal woman Marcia Ella-Duncan led the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce in NSW to examine the incidence of child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities, and to review the effectiveness of government service responses to this issue.

The taskforce visited twenty-nine communities throughout NSW and 300 people were consulted.

Aboriginal people had a voice; they told their truth.

In 2007, Rex Wild and Pat Anderson, an Aboriginal woman,





led the Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse in the Northern Territory.

The inquiry held more than 260 meetings with interested parties.

Aboriginal people had a voice; they told their truth.

In 2008, Ted Mullighan led the Commission of Inquiry Children on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia.

The inquiry visited eight communities on the Lands and held 147 meetings. Aborigines had a voice; they told their truth.

The 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse contained a special sub-report about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Between 2013 and 2017, it heard about the experiences of 985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors.

Aboriginal people had a voice; they told their truth.

Each and every one of these reports have made copious recommendations to

governments, and governments have responded fulsomely.

Any recommendations not supported were often irrelevant to the life of Aboriginal people, or beyond the gift of government.

When activists argue, for example, that the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have not been implemented they need to understand that only six per cent of the 339 recommendations have not been implemented and that these relate to self-determination, in other words, attempts to gain political power.

Much has been done, Aborigines had a voice and were heard. None of this necessarily changes lives if the mindset of policy-makers never changes.

'Truth telling' in the Uluru proposal is designed to start a narrative to create a demand: 'you owe us.'

Truth commissions are merely politically useful reconstructions of the past.

If the primary task of truth commissions were to provide the full picture of human rights

violations, they would be wasting their time.

All that is known is on the record, that which was not recorded generations ago is not first-hand observation, and not reliable.

More recent and current violations are well within the capacity of existing organisations, inquiries, police and courts to manage and respond to.

To trawl history rarely satisfies every person's desire for 'justice', but it always mistakes what is necessary now.

The great harm of truth telling is to ignore the lives of those who need help to begin a path to a better life based on their capacity and circumstances.







What if the truth commissioners told these truths?

Life journeys of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Recognise a Better Way committee provide some of the answers to those Aboriginal people who need help.

The Gap closes when these journeys are successful. Building an entire new political architecture – Voice, Treaty, 'Truth' - will not enhance the chances of Aboriginal children having a better life.

The following section contains stories from



Ian Conway



Bob Liddle



Kerry White



Ian Conway

I am a proud Indigenous Australian born at Mparntwe (Alice Springs). All of my Aboriginal ancestors were born in Mparntwe. On the European side many of my ancestors were from Scotland and England.

I often hear of growing up in poverty, but what is it? My family had very little but made the best of what they had. Love wasn't lost to poverty.

Because of the lifestyle we led, hunting and learning the importance of the Alcherra (dreamtime), our lives were very different to most European families. As my family said, we led a very fortunate life.

Life for me went like this. I was born in 1949. My mother already had three children.

In 1951 my mother was sent to Adelaide with breast cancer. Three weeks later she died and was buried in a pauper's grave. She was buried in a grave with a stranger.

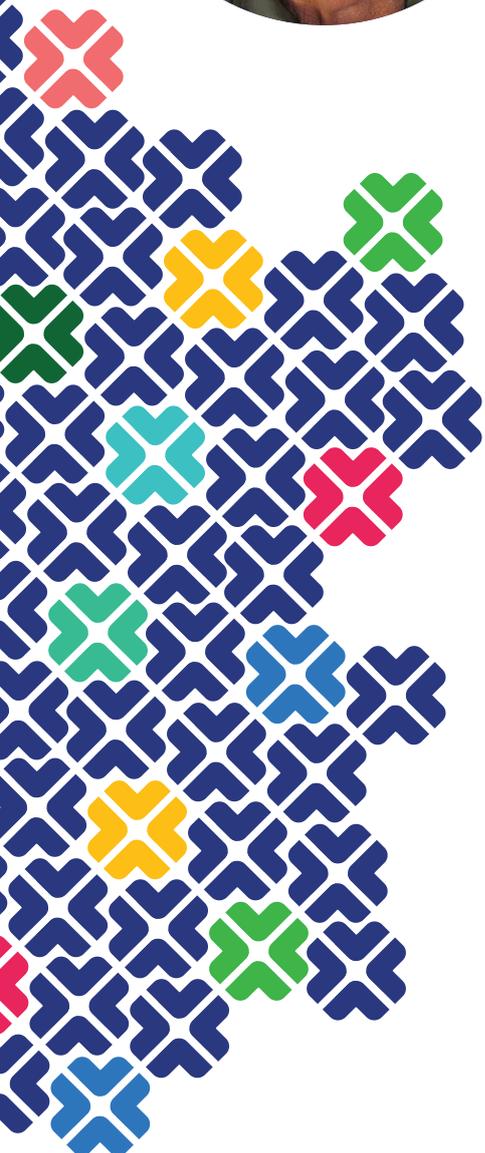
Almost 72 years later, my siblings and extended family and I exhumed my Mum's remains and

took her back to her own country – Mparntwe. She was buried alongside her mother where she belongs.

My grandmother cared for me as a baby. She had plenty of help from her children – my uncles and aunts. Gran was totally lost during the remaining years of her life she missed her daughter so much.

She had no idea where Adelaide was and believed the earth was flat and if you went too far from your own country you would 'fall off'. Gran, my uncles, aunts, siblings and cousins never mentioned Mum's name to me.

At the age of 21, I received a letter from the Catholic Church in Adelaide with my Mum's last will and testament. She left me \$18 and it was at this time I learnt her name and my connection to my family.



As an infant of Aboriginal descent I was often pursued by Aboriginal welfare. I spent a number of years in the St Johns Hostel in Alice Springs.

It was recognised as a stopping off point for many coloured kids who became 'Stolen Generation'.

When I was six my father, an Aboriginal man, appeared on the scene and took me away from the hostel. He was born around 1900 and got his 'citizenship' in 1935 so he was entitled to have access to his child.

My siblings who were half-brothers and a half-sister were fostered and adopted. Their lives were upturned, and in many instances very sad. However, they made good in their lives. I never saw my sister after my mother died until I was 18 years old.

Much happened to me and my siblings over those years, but our family supported us always – even to this day.

During the 1920's to the late 1930's Mum and Gran became well-

diggers and yard-builders. Many of the old ladies and men in our extended families worked just as hard as station hands, cooks, domestics and carers for white families.

When I look back on my families' achievements and the comment by one my uncles, 'there is no such thing as can't.' I am very proud to say even when times are tough, and all seems lost there is a rainbow on the horizon.

Today the younger generation of our families have proved they don't need the Voice to succeed in life.

Amongst them are lawyers, doctors, airline pilots, police, politicians, anthropologists, and scientists.

My family have done it alone. The opportunities are out there.

The Voice will not represent educated Aboriginals.

As for the remote and uneducated Aboriginals there is already many well-funded organisations which

have been set up to deal with health, education etc.

Anthony Albanese and the Voice committee have certainly overlooked the protocol set down for thousands of years.

Individual language groups do not represent another.

There are over 250 languages and dialects that were spoken in Australia. I, as an Indigenous Australian do not feel comfortable with some stranger representing my family.





Bob Liddle

I was born at Hatches Creek, a Wolfram (Tungsten) mining area 200 kms North East of Alice Springs in 1939. I am the eldest of six children from Milton and Polly Liddle.

My Paternal Grandfather William Liddle was a second generation Scot whose father came from the Orkney Islands north of the coast of Scotland.

My paternal Grandmother Mary was an Arrernte woman, born in Alice Springs circa 1887, whose mother was a full blooded woman from Alice Springs.

Mary's father was Francis James Gillen who arrived in Alice Springs in 1875 as a 20 year old and later appointed Telegraph Station master and an associate of Baldwin Spencer.

My mother was a full blooded woman from the Allywarra language group 200 kms north east of Alice Springs.

My early childhood was spent at Hatches Creek where my father Milton was a Wolfram miner.

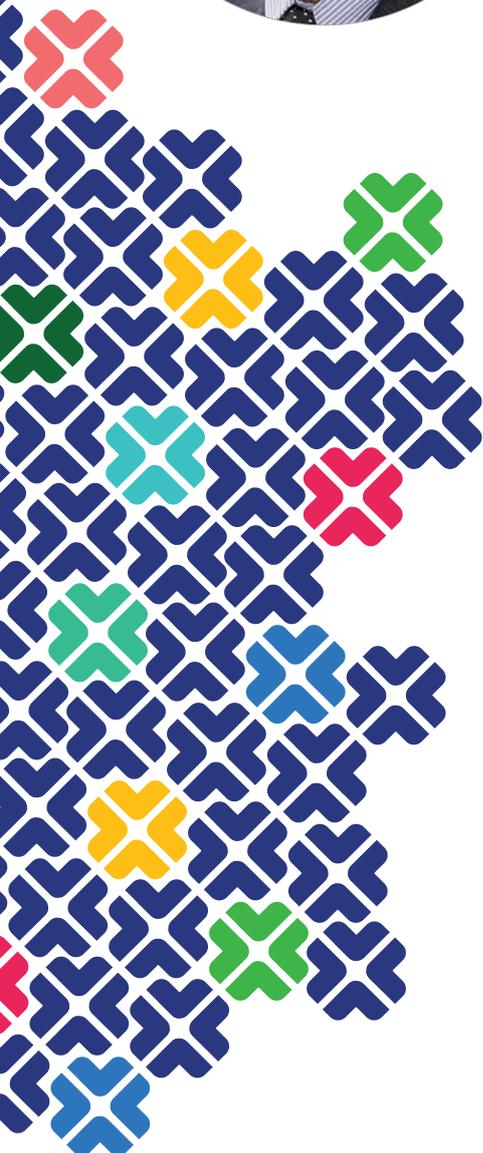
The family moved to Alice Springs during WWII where my father joined the Army.

At the end of WWII my father, together with my younger brother Arthur took over the Pastoral property Angas Downs Station from their father William Liddle.

I continued my education at the Alice Spring High School and left in 1955 to join Commonwealth Oil Refineries (COR) where I stayed for 18 months before joining Shell Co.

In January 1958 at 18 years I flew out of Alice Springs on a TAA DC4 bound for Melbourne where I took up duties as a trainee electrical linesman with the Victorian State Electricity Commission.

During the period 1958-1964 I also campaigned as a professional boxer and had some 45 fights at Festival Hall and NZ.



I remain the first and only NT boxer to have fought a main event over 12 rounds at the old Sydney Stadium in Ruscutters Bay, against Sid Prior in 1962.

In 1973 I joined the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as a senior liaison officer in the NT and helped establish the Aboriginal Aid Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service in Central Australia. I was also a member of the National Aboriginal Housing Panel.

I left the Department in 1977, and became the director of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Manager of Aboriginal Congress during 1977 to the end of 1978.

At the end of 1978 I was approached by the Magellan group of companies to help them in their efforts to get a production license for the Mereenie Oil and Gas field on Aboriginal land West of Alice Springs.

The companies had only two meetings with the Central Land Council in a two year period and had reached an impasse in the negotiations.

It took me less than 12 months to hold 10 meetings and reach

agreement on the financial terms with the companies and the CLC.

This work resulted in the granting of the historical Mereenie Oil and Gas production lease, the first Oil and Gas lease granted on Aboriginal land in 1980-81.

During the 1980s, I became active in politics and was elected to the Alice Springs Town Council for two terms.

I was also elected Chairman of the Country Liberal Party in Alice Springs and continued consulting for many resource companies in the NT, SA, WA and QLD.

In 1985, I was part of a delegation of young political leaders to tour the US together with former National Party leader John Anderson and dined at the White House and met President Ronald Reagan and Mrs Reagan.

In 2013, I was awarded the Order of Australia Medal OAM for services to the community, in particular the Indigenous community and the Oil and Gas Industry.

I continue to consult for a number of companies in QLD and the NT.





Kerry White

My Grandfather was Narrungga as are his children, my mother is one of 13 children. His parents, brothers and sisters were also Narrungga, his grandmother came from up north.

I was born in Port Augusta, so I am both Narrungga and Utnamutna. I have ties through extended family members with Kurna, Nukunu, Walpari and Pitjantjatjara.

I have also had the pleasure of working with Aboriginal people from all over Australia.

Throughout my life I had to overcome many challenges. As a child I was powerless to change my circumstances, as an adult I viewed myself as a survivor not a victim. Viewing ourselves as a victim suggests we are powerless to change our circumstances.

I am of mixed race beginning with an Aboriginal grandfather and a non-aboriginal grandmother.

When I was born my mother left me with my grandmother, whom I lived with until I was around four years of age.

Long before I was born mixed race children were not accepted by blacks or whites. Living in town with my grandmother provided us with protection but we were not allowed to tell anyone that we had aboriginal heritage.

My grandfather and his brothers fought in the second world war; his brothers did not return. My grandmother said that the man that came back was not the man she married.

It was during his time in service that he was exposed to alcohol, when he returned, he drank and began beating up my grandmother. Thankfully he did not live with us then, so it was only problematic when he visited.

It was then that I was taken to live with my mother and the man that would become my stepfather. It was a confusing time in my life, as

my mother and stepfather abused us, more so my stepfather.

As I was growing up the family moved around a lot, usually every three to six months. My stepfather worked for both the South Australian and Commonwealth Railways. For the first four years after I was taken from my Grandmother, we lived in small railway settlements.

The first was Wynbring halfway across the Nullabour that's where the family got hit with nuclear fallout from Maralinga.

I think it was after that we moved to Nackara. We also lived at Narroodla, Oodlawirra, Carrington, Adelaide, Quorn, Riverton, Peterborough, Millicent, Narracourte, Taillem Bend and Port Pirie.

The family moved back to Quorn when I was in the sixth grade and remained there for approximately eight years.

There was also another railway camp in the Nullabour where we lived the name I don't recall.

My grandfather stayed with us for the short time we were there, he used to talk to the Aboriginal people in language and go off with them sometimes.

I began following him once and he said I had to go home because he was going on men's business and that I couldn't go with him

We were from a poor family so the government paid for our education, I loved school and was privileged to enjoy a good education through the white education system.

I wanted to be a vet when I left school, but my parents said I had to get a job. After completing year 11 I applied to the local hospital to become a nurse.

Luckily back then we received our training and education on the job in rural hospitals. Back then our on-the-job training and education was better than our city counterparts.

By the early seventies mixed raced children became more readily accepted so I no longer had to

hide my Aboriginal heritage. It was also the first time that I had seen Aboriginal children with darker skin than my own in the public school system.

I had an olive complexion in my younger years most people assumed that I was Greek or Italian. I was asked on a few occasions if I was adopted, they stated that it was because I did not belong in that family.

I served on boards and committees, both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal. My area of expertise is in health and small business, I have worked in both public and private sectors, including the Welfare system.

As an adult I realised that there are still many challenges facing not only Aboriginal people but also others with little to no education.

What has been done to overcome these challenges in the past has not and will not work. We need a better way if we are to move forward and face these challenges head on.



Recognise a better way

There are three things a government should do in lieu of any new political structure. The Recognise a Better Way committee strongly urges a better way to recognise prior occupation and help those in need, with three steps:



Recognise prior occupation of Aboriginal people in a preamble to the constitution



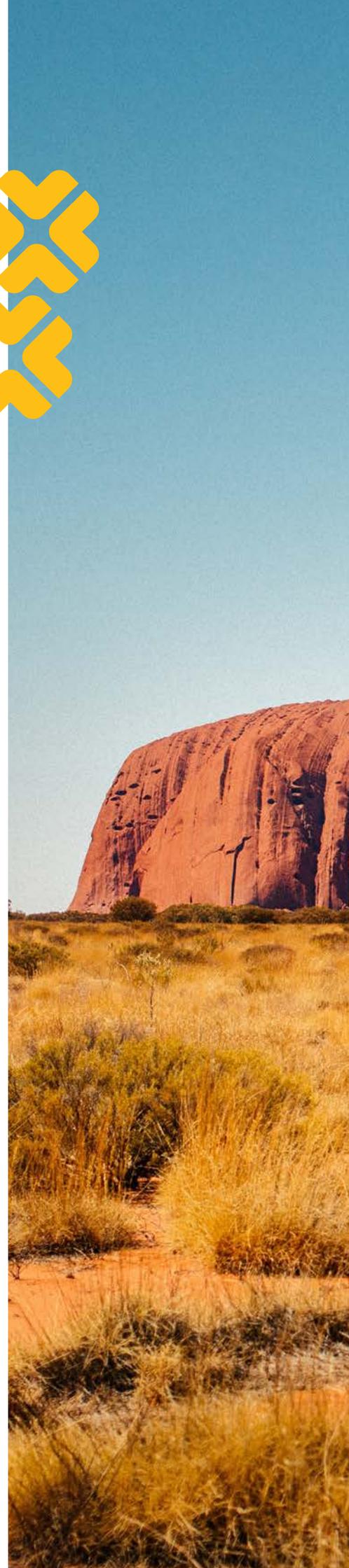
Establish a Parliamentary all-party standing committee for native title holders



Support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations

Aboriginal people do not need more voices; they need a way into the wider society.

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Anthony Albanese promised action on the Uluru Statement from the Heart. So what is the proposed Indigenous Voice to Parliament?

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-24/federal-election-anthony-albanese-indigenous-uluru-statement/101092816>