

The 18th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture

Charles Darwin University

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***The Right for Australia's First Peoples to be self-determining
Requires a collective mind shift***

Presenter: Nangari Josephine Crawshaw

I acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional owners of Darwin, the Larrakia people. I was born on Larrakia land and have lived my life here on their beautiful country.

I also acknowledge all my Gurindji family and all other First Nations peoples that are here today.

I am a proud Gurindji Stolen Generation descendant.

I feel so privileged to deliver the 18th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture in honour of my people's fight to be recognised as the rightful owners/custodians of our lands.

Thank you to CDU and especially Wendy Ludwig for your invitation to share my 50-year story of continuing the fight of my ancestors for the recognition that this is our country.

INTRODUCTION

This story is about the history of contact, occupation and the ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples.

The first part of my family and my story is inextricably linked to and dominated by all of the policies that appear on the screen.

This slide shows the ongoing control under the guise of benevolent governments to date.

The periods that appear on the screen indicate the various times, policies, strategies, programs and initiatives that have been implemented, imposed and used to manage the lives and aspirations of my families and those of Aboriginal peoples here in the NT over the past 120 years.

It's a story about:

- *My family history of survival:*
- *My fight for Aboriginal rights;*
- *The struggle that is on-going and relentless;*
- *The experiences that show us that the more things change, the more they stay the same*
- *My thoughts for the future: how to win back the unique rights of First Nations people and the right to be seen as human beings.*

My paper is to honour and pay tribute to my Gurindji heritage, starting with the Gurindji Walk Off led by inspirational leader Vincent Lingiari which this event is in his memory, to my mother Nawurla Daisy Cusack Ruddick and to my mother's youngest brother, Jurlama Peter Limbunya Bungiari.

All three are my countryman and women, my elders, my leaders and my family. On one hand they shared a common history. They were born at a time of colonial history where the last vestiges of land theft

of the Australian continent occurred, the frontier lands of the Northern Territory.

A blind eye to the extermination practices of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory occurred up until the late 1930s which went unchecked to secure the last of the frontier lands which my mother, Vincent and Uncle Peter were born into.

Their lives and socialisation in terms of connection to country, culture, language and family took different paths, yet because of these policies – Segregation and Assimilation, that they were subject to meant that they automatically became Wards of the State.

HISTORY

We are today, remembering the nine-year workers strike—the Gurindji Walk Off led by Vincent Lingiari and Dexter Daniels—which had a direct impact on and contributed to a high point in Australia’s history—the 1967 referendum.

Over 90% of Australians voted YES to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the nation’s population count and to enable the federal government to legislate on matters specifically concerning Australia’s First Peoples.

The walk-off from Vestey’s cattle stations which began on August 23, 1966 started a battle that caught the attention of Australian workers and students and of the world.

It was the first time that the deplorable working and living conditions of Aboriginal workers and their families on cattle stations were exposed to the nation and the world.

This story is not an easy one to tell or to write.

It is a bittersweet experience.

Bitter because of the loss and suffering my mother and her brothers endured under the legalised genocide carried out by white Australia based on irrational theories about blood and race.

Police stole mum from her country and her family and her mother.

She was locked in an institution for the so-called 'half-castes'.

Her brother—Peter Limbunya—my uncle, confined to living in 'the black's camp'.

All because one child had a white father and the other a black father!!!

This era is considered to be the commencement of the "Divide and Rule" Strategy that continues to be applied in a more insidious way today still based on irrational theories of blood and race – 120 years later!!!

'Traditional'/'full blood' people with a land base are promoted as 'real' at the expense of urban/rural based people and those 'mixed race' people who are all assumed to have not continued to maintain their connections to this land base, or through forcible removals over generations have been denied this connection.

This is an abhorrent continuation of the irrational theory about blood.

An instrument used as the determinant of rights and belonging and appears to underpin the current NT Treaty MOU between the government and the four land councils.

This alienation and division is further reinforced by the deepening marginalisation of people living off country (approx. 70% of the Australian Aboriginal population), yet land councils have accepted the political construct as the self-appointed and mandated voice to negotiate any matters of national significance relating to First Nations Peoples.

It's a sweet story because they were Australia's version of holocaust survivors who went on to fight for recognition first for their rights as human beings and secondly as sovereign First Peoples of Australia.

I am unapologetic about using this term – my mother used it often describing Kahlin Compound as a concentration camp – one of many in this country.

In spite of the massacres and the genocidal practices, our people survived!

In my mum's case, the aim was to assimilate her - to 'breed out the black' in her and in my uncle's case, the authorities - government and police - segregated him and my people from the rest of society so they would eventually 'die out'.

Limbunya Station, about 90km west of Wave Hill - Kalkarindji on August 15, 1915 was where my mother was born on Gurindji country on one of several cattle stations owned in Australian law by English aristocrat, Lord Vestey.

Her mother, Demae, was a Gurindji woman who lived in the Aboriginal camp on the station and her father was an Irishman named Jack Cusack, who was the station manager.

My mother had a brother and sister out of this relationship, Jack Jnr. and Judy. She also had two other brothers Spider and Peter that her mother had with her traditional husband.

In 1922 while her parents were both away from the station, the local policeman- Tom Turner- arrived at Limbunya, stole Mum, along with Ruby King and her sister Maggie Wilson. Ruby King was the mother of Darwin's well-known ABC sports commentator, Charlie King - Mum was six years old.

The children were taken on horseback to Timber Creek, which took several weeks, and then by boat to Darwin.

My mother never saw her mother or father again and her life changed forever.

These children and all other children confronted with the same double standard treatment at the hands of the authorities automatically became Wards of the State.

They would continue to be classified as such until the change in citizen status occurred with the Constitutional change that occurred as a result of the successful 1967 Referendum.

Nothing had prepared them for life in Kahlin Compound.

The children were confined in galvanised sheds behind a fence, segregated from the white folk and the 'full bloods'.

They were starving, suffered daily beatings and were tied to a wooden post and left for hours in the sun as punishment. Their toilet in the dormitory was a kerosene tin.

At the age of 11, mum was sent out to live and work as a domestic servant for Mrs. Asche, the wife of the Crown's Chief solicitor.

This was a pivotal turning point in her life and resulted in a positive happy story for the time that she was with the Asches.

Mum remembered she was treated like one of their own and anything their children got, she got.

One of her duties was to look out for and be a playmate to Austin—their son.

Austin did not consider her as his nanny, she was his big sister. Their bond was so deep that their lifelong brother and sister relationship endured until she passed in 2002.

Mum was returned to the compound after a few years, but she was eternally grateful to the Asche family for the kindness they showed her.

She was by this stage, a very assertive and self-assured young woman and this was not lost on the infamous NT Aboriginal Chief Protector, Dr. Cecil Cook.

Dr. Cook (in his additional role of the NT Chief Medical Officer) began a program to train a small group of girls from the compound to become nurse assistants. Mum was part of this program and became the first Aboriginal Health Worker in the Northern Territory.

In 1934, mum was sent from the compound to help Dr. Clyde Fenton and a senior white nurse to run the newly opened Katherine hospital.

After a few years, Dr. Cook recalled mum back to the compound and she was placed in charge of the newly opened Bagot hospital.

At that stage, Mum was very unhappy - she was now 23 and had been incarcerated in Kahlin Compound since the age of 6 years—17yrs.

I would like to read out the letter she wrote on the 2 December 1938 to the NT Administrator protesting about being denied citizenship rights and seeking his counsel to leave the Kahlin ‘Half-Caste’ Home.

It still makes me angry and sad today.

Dear Sir,

I the undersigned do hereby make complaint that I have citizens' rights.

I am 23 years of age, have been in medical service for seven years, but am subjected to being locked up in the girls home. I wholeheartedly resent this treatment as I am engaged to be married and I am quite responsible for my actions.

Trusting you will do something for me.

I am your obedient servant

Miss Daisy Cusack

Despite Cecil Cook being known to be a tyrant, he nevertheless encouraged my mother to save her pay from her nursing job and at the age of 25 became the first Aboriginal woman to buy one of the first 5 Aboriginal Trust homes - which is extraordinary when you think about it.

Like all other Aboriginal “half-castes”, Mum had to get permission from Dr. Cook to marry my father, a white man - Joseph Ruddick..

Shortly after they were married, World War II broke out, my dad was called up for service in the RAAF, and mum was evacuated to Mildura.

At the end of the war, people were once again forced to live under the oppressive regime of pre- war policies of control and discrimination.

Both Daisy and Joe, along with Jack McGinness, Babe Damaso and Paddy Carolin found it necessary to re-establish The Half Castes Progressive Association (which had waned during the war years) to advocate for full citizenship rights of Aboriginal people.

The exclusion imposed by the RSL, of returned soldiers in mixed marriages who weren't allowed to take their wives to the club, prompted the Association to establish the Sunshine Club in protest.

It was an instant hit because its patrons truly reflected the multi-cultural society of Darwin.

Daisy and Joe—my parents, had three children—my two older sisters and me. Like mum, we automatically became Wards of the State as we were deemed non-citizens of Australia and as such were subject to the constraints of the prevailing Act, legislation and Ordinance.

Their marriage was in constant turmoil having to deal with the tensions of mixed marriages and deeply rooted racial contradictions and the hypocrisy of the prevailing policy of the day – Assimilation.

They separated in 1952 and my father automatically got ownership of my mother's house and was given legal custody of my sisters and me.

It took my mother several years to regain custody of us again and she was eventually able to buy back her trust home for the second time.

Mum supported my sisters and me by continuing to work as a domestic in the hospital wards in Darwin and then in final years of her paid working life, as an Olgaman Girl Friday at Hastings Deerings at Salonika.

They—the Stolen Generation—have endured the greatest impact of colonisation through the attacks on family, land, culture and language. These injustices continued to drive mum in her activism and her ongoing advocacy to seek recognition for the Stolen Generations and compensation for the impacts of Australia's policy of genocide.

Some of the advocacy works that she participated, into her 70s included:

- The Going Home Conference
- Giving evidence at the National Inquiry into the Separation of ATSI children from Families
- Presenter on the *Between Two Worlds National Campaign* speaking/ exhibition tour

Despite the lifetime of struggle and hardship, my mother didn't become embittered. She was a tremendous force for good and for moving the Territory closer to the ideal of inclusiveness and equality for all.

Her impact on people's lives was broad and deep and on her passing in 2002, 2000 people turned out to pay their respects to this great Gurindji warrior woman and Territorian.

Mum's youngest brother—Jurlama Peter Limbunya—was born in 1928.

Despite having his big sister stolen in 1922, they finally got to meet each other and establish a brother/sister relationship.

Their first meeting occurred when he was 54 and Daisy was 67 yrs. of age.

Uncle Peter was a senior law man and was a recognised practitioner and holder of medicine knowledge which he practiced across the region. These roles carried great responsibilities and obligations that he maintained with dignity.

As mentioned earlier, their paths in lives took very different directions and for Uncle Peter, he worked and lived in slave conditions in the black's camp at Limbunya station – part of Lord Vestey's empire.

Like all cattle station workers and their families, their movements were restricted, they worked for rations and they were subjected to extreme racist practices and harsh conditions.

Nevertheless, they were able to maintain connection to country, language and culture.

Uncle Peter was 38 in 1966, when the Wave Hill walk off commenced and like many of the strikers and their families put down their swags at Daguragu – the strikers encampment.

He, along with his family stayed there until his death.

During the strike years, this community withstood numerous attempts to break them and the strike, but still they stand strong.

This community, that still exists today, continues to be known as and treated as the strikers' community.

As a result of this stance, this community has continued to be marginalised because they have never conceded their rights to exercise their sovereignty based on the lessons learnt from the 1966 walk off.

This community's staunch stance sadly has been penalised and I believe it has resulted in the most blatant and disproportionate distribution of resources, infrastructure and community development opportunities currently in Australia, compared to other Aboriginal communities.

When we visited Uncle Peter and the extended family in 1982, we were not able to stay with him and family at Daguragu because of overcrowding and we had to go and stay in Kalkarindji.

We were struck by Uncle Peter's reluctance to come to Kalkarindji because of his disdain and mistrust of the township because of its association with the governments' of the day and its role in accommodating the original opponents and strike breakers.

Sadly in 2006 at the age of 78 this elderly Gurindji statesman's life ends tragically on the outskirts of Daguragu.

Everyone involved in providing quality health care and duty of care to Aboriginals living remotely from services failed in their duty.

The District Medical Officer, who lived in Perth – some thousands of kilometres away from Daguragu, makes the fatal decision to deny my uncle an escort – despite uncle being elderly and having limited

movement, minimal English, being functionally blind and with early stage dementia.

This decision was contrary to the Patient Travel Escort policy and guidelines that allowed the elderly to travel with an escort and resulted in fatality that was totally avoidable.

Whilst being treated at Katherine hospital, uncle in the last 10 days of his life, he had no one speak to him in a language that he understood, despite the hospital having access to the official Aboriginal Interpreter Service located at the hospital.

The fax from Patient Travel at Katherine Hospital to the Kalkarindji Health Clinic, advising them of uncle's return has never been located.

The pilot that delivered uncle back failed in his duty to ensure that uncle was delivered safely back to his community.

The airstrip is five kms from Daguragu and three kms from Kalkarindji – the pilot fails to notify the community that he is due to land, he lands, remains on the ground for six minutes and departs.

The pilot has escorted uncle off the plane, locks him outside the airstrip perimeter fence and fails to radio the community from the plane that he has left an elderly, blind man at the airstrip with no water.

My cousin brother—his son—makes enquiries twice in 3 days about his father and when he would be returning home. He realises, based on the bits and pieces of information that he can get that his father was dropped off 3 days previously!!!

A search is instigated and is called off after four days. Three countrymen continue the search and find uncle's body 800 metres from the airstrip.

Our family and even the NT branch of the Australian Medical Association called it institutional racism and we continue with the belief that uncle's death was avoidable and no one has ever been made to account.

I tell this story because this callous treatment and poor practices meted out to First Nations peoples in this country demonstrates that it continues with tragic results.

Sharing these stories will give you some understanding as to why I continue to fight on the frontline. Because from the moment I can remember, everything that affected my life, prompted me to develop an understanding of, an opinion about our existence and a voice of advocacy for justice.

So it was a natural progression that my life's work has been one of activism and advocacy. Is it a surprise that I fight for the rights of my people to have direct control over the decisions that affect our lives?

Isn't this what we all know as being our basic human and civil rights?

It's my families' stories that have fed my passion to see justice for my people.

Their activism and resilience have made them two of the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans of this 230-year continuing war.

We Territorians, are the beneficiaries of theirs and many others' blood, sweat, and tears that are at the core of the economic development and prosperity of the Territory.

Their contributions largely go unrecognised.

My mother was a fine, upstanding citizen and a rock to many in the Darwin Aboriginal community.

She is my hero.

Mum, it's "Because of You I Can."

At the age of 14, I first became aware that things were not right for me because I was Aboriginal, when I attended boarding school in Queensland where the differential treatment meted out to others compared to me and the girls from Palm Island and the Torres Straits was very obvious.

Through a regime that was ruled by fear, food deprivation and physical violence, control and obedience were taught, so that we, the children would conform and in later life become compliant women.

Given that, I had been and continued to be raised at the time by a fiercely strong and independent Aboriginal mother, I was on a collision course with the school authorities.

These clashes continued for the 3 years that I attended this boarding school.

These experiences were magnified as I grew older and as a young adult, I experienced the direct impacts of the policies of the Segregation and Assimilation era of the 70s:

- Darwin's segregated Star picture theatre;
- in 1970 my best friend—a white girl—was forced to leave the National Bank because she socialised with me;
- my future father-in-law warned his son that we couldn't come to live in Adelaide because it would be unfair to other residents in the street because their houses would be devalued;
- evacuated after the cyclone and had trouble renting because we were Aboriginal and it wasn't until an intervention by a white friend who accompanied one of my sisters to secure a rental property.

Setting the socio-political context that emerged and built momentum internationally and nationally from the 1960s–80s—a period of massive change—will give you insight into the drivers that have influenced and helped shape me and the lives of many change makers in this country.

Strong leadership with a vision for this country ensured a population that was willing to embrace positive socio-political change nationally. In tandem with major international human rights changes that were

adopted and resulted in universal structural changes that has impacted on our lives.

A number of international covenants provided the political framework and were the catalysts for the implementation of modern universal rights in this country.

A few examples of a few major changes that were adopted in the Australian context. They are:

- Equal pay for women;
- Welfare payments for the homeless
- Supporting parents benefits
- Paid maternity leave
- Voting rights for Indigenous peoples
- Racial Discrimination Act introduced
- Medicare
- Free university education
- NT Aboriginal Land Rights Act

This period of massive social and political change created the ideal climate for the emergence of some of the most powerful and long standing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in this country e.g.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services;
- Aboriginal Hostels;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services; and
- Aboriginal Land Councils

Fundamental and genuine support for and commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being involved in the drafting of United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was a watershed period mainly because there was great leadership through the efforts of Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating.

These are some of the influential liberating waves of change that I have had the privilege to be immersed in after the first two decades of control and subjugation that I was born into in this country.

My life's work of advocacy and activism has been informed and enriched by my global exposure to how Indigenous collective and individual rights were being exercised in other locations.

I have focused particularly on examining their political, financial, social and business development entities.

In 1986, I undertook a six-month research fellowship to Canada and America, visiting Native Indian and Inuit communities, villages and reservations that have signed Treaties or Land Settlement Agreements with their respective nation states.

I was interested in looking at models of self-determination.

In both countries, self-determination had involved complete or partial transfer of legislative, executive and judicial powers to Indian and Inuit nations.

One of the most significant pieces of international work that I have had the privilege to be involved in and contributed to, was the negotiations and drafting of the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The declaration took 25 years to be negotiated and ratified. In 2007, around 150 nations ratified the Declaration.

It took Australia a further two years before they bowed to international pressure to ratify the Declaration.

This achievement by the international community of First Nations Peoples saw the UN establishing a Permanent Forum whereby all signatories to the Declaration, are bound to report annually on the implementation of the articles.

These experiences and insights have supported my advocacy for the application of these rights to be implemented here in Australia when I was an ATSIC Commissioner and roles that I have held in both the Public and NGO Sectors.

Engagement and contributions to local, national and international forums, initiatives and movements have equipped me to provide insights and analysis on a broad range of issues.

Matters of sovereignty, self-determination, constitutional recognition and reform, land and resource rights, health, education, employment and cultural and spiritual rights within the government and non-government sectors.

I believe that the period from 1972-1996 led by Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating, was the most powerful and liberating era in Aboriginal Affairs in this country.

This era saw the establishment of policy and service delivery organisations such as Aboriginal Development Commission and ATSIC that gave a voice and limited control to Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal involvement in Federal, State and Territory policy and program development saw service delivery transfer to community controlled organisations.

For example the establishment of land councils, health and legal services, women and youth programs, housing cooperatives, local government community councils, radio and television stations, language and interpreter services and programs.

Sadly, with the exit of these visionary leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were again marginalised and excluded from policy and program decisions that affect our lives.

I am going to make a bold statement – in writing this lecture, I have come to the realisation that out of the 230 years of occupation of this country, we have only been afforded a 25 year window of empowerment.

The return to the centralisation of the bureaucracy has become a bigger obstacle to Indigenous advancement since Howard where the approach to Aboriginal affairs and closing the gap on disadvantage has seen the emergence of process over content and knowledge.

Noel Pearson, in 2015 observes:

“We’ve outsourced all of the functions of government to private and not for profit organisations, hardly any of them indigenous, because we’ve constructed an industry, a major industry around indigenous disadvantage... Whilst this outsourcing may be said to be more efficient, the truth is that we have now created and entrenched industries whose sole rationale is the existence of social problems. Beyond the employment and training services industries, we now have private industries in all manner of social need and misery...”

As it currently stands, our communities are being drowned by people and organisations that ostensibly exist to improve our lives.

How can it be possible for our lives to be improved—for us to be able to build and rebuild our communities—when the very means of rebuilding are occupied by others?

There is an unshakeable belief by government that we, as First Nations peoples continue to require interventions—that we are incapable of managing our affairs.

The governments’ \$35b Indigenous Affairs budget, since being outsourced ***“... has created a private industry that has become entrenched and whose sole rationale is the existence of social problems...and as...having no incentive for players to work to resolve the social problems that is their market”***. Noel Pearson: 2015

This is despite their track record of successive failure of the closing the gap on disadvantage and poverty.

Leadership from Howard onwards has been obsessed with race and the agenda that is being promulgated is one of neo-colonialism.

Richard Flanagan in his address to the National Press Club in April this year provided the following observation:

“Our society grows increasingly more unequal, more disenfranchised, angrier, more fearful...Our institutions are frayed. Our polity is discredited, and almost daily discredits itself further damaging our democratic institutions, our freedoms and our

value...since John Howard we have all witnessed our country slide into inexplicable nationalisms and ethnic hatreds”.

Since Federation, 120 years of government driven policies and associated strategies, programs and initiatives, I believe the overall wellbeing of the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, regardless of location, are not any better now than they were then.

The fact that in the past 27 years (1991-Current) despite a pseudo policy of Reconciliation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs has been managed and operated within a policy vacuum that has culminated in program development, initiatives and government responses being made on the run and in an ad hoc manner.

This has resulted in vastly different and divisive interventions that have been proved to have no basis in fact.

Richard Flanagan observes that politics needs to have as its highest intent, the holding of society together, but he notes that it has in fact retreated to repeating:

“... divisive myths that have no foundation in the truth of what we are as a nation, and so, finally only serve to contribute to the forces that could yet destroy us. Or worse yet, openly stoking needless fear and as with the refugee issue, a xenophobia for short-term electoral advantage.”

It is clear that the Commonwealth Government’s NT Intervention and the imposition of martial law on citizens of this country that there has been a return to an agenda of cultural genocide e.g.

- slave labour—CDP;
- 99 yr. leases – on land won back under the 1976 Land Rights Act—before basic housing and safe infrastructure provided
- removal of children—the numbers are greater now than the times of the original Stolen Generations;

- blanket welfare quarantining—rations for work

There are no other Australian citizens who are subjected to these types of punitive, racist policies.

Running alongside the cultural genocide agenda that we are currently experiencing, the government is leading and funding a treadmill of consultations and dialogues on how we, the First Nations peoples should be recognised in the Australian Constitution.

You will note (on the slide) that the decade (or more) of Australian Government led and funded platforms to discuss – ***“How Australia’s First Nations Peoples should be recognised in the Australian Constitution”***.

The Prime Minister’s Referendum Council established in 2015 was specifically mandated to advise the PM and the Opposition Leader on the progress and steps towards a Referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In order to canvas the mood, depth and intent of the broader Australian population, the Referendum Council was tasked with facilitating a range of meetings, consultations and gatherings with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, organisations and individuals.

Over the past two years, I have been intricately involved in the design, development and implementation of a process for collating Aboriginal and Torres Islander views on how we, as First Nation Peoples want to be formally recognised.

The Referendum Council conducted a total of three national and thirteen regional dialogues covering the length and breadth of this continent.

The dialogues were used as much needed and long overdue opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to get together and talk about the historical and current challenges that have rendered us powerless as occupation.

To this end, the debates were much broader than the original intent of the Referendum Council's mandate regarding constitutional recognition.

The agenda going forward and the strategies that emerged from these dialogues were deemed to be both democratic and structural in nature.

Therefore calls for substantial reforms are necessary and there was a rejection of the government's minimalist offer of recognition in the preamble of the Constitution.

The culmination of the dialogues was the final gathering that occurred at Uluru in May 2017, where around 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples produced and endorsed a very profound document/statement – the **Uluru Statement of the Heart** – that one commentator considered, at the time of its creation, as:

“history unfolding in real time, the laying out of an ancient, timeless Australian trajectory on to which was stitched a blueprint for a radical future, a proposed realignment of relations between First Nations and the settler state.” The Australian, May 2018

The Uluru Statement of the Heart has emerged as the latest instrument produced by First Nations peoples that clearly states and asserts, yet again, that sovereignty, truth and self-determination continue to be the priorities.

In the meantime, in June 2017, the Referendum Council tabled its report to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The report contained two recommendations but in reality both recommendations were specific to “the Voice”.

The recommendation states:

“In principle, the establishment by the Constitution of a body to be a Voice for First Peoples, with the structure and functions of the body to be defined by Parliament, may be seen as an appropriate form of recognition, of both substantive and symbolic value, of the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian history and in contemporary Australian society.”

The proposal was that “the Voice” would be an advisory body established by government who would design and decide its roles, functions, powers and membership—once again usurping our rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially the right to free, prior and informed consent.

It is my view that this conclusion is the latest effort to try and alter the narrative that has been maintained by the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this country.

As far back as 1846, when the first petition was lodged by a group of Aboriginal people in Tasmania, we stand firm in the knowledge that recognition of sovereignty is the core to any further developments.

It must be remembered that the **Uluru Statement of the Heart** is the statement of the heart of the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that were both representing themselves, families and communities as well as being the united voice for all of us.

The Referendum Council Report, as we all know, was rejected by the Prime Minister in October 2017.

Prime Minister Turnbull's rejection of the Referendum Council's report and the First Nations aspirational document—**The Uluru Statement of the Heart** document—indicated, yet again, that the government refuses to create a vision for this country.

The full truth of who we are as a people, the oldest continuing organised society on the planet—60,000 years continues to be denied.

This will continue to be a point of contention, because we, First Nations peoples maintain that we have always been here—from the Beginning of Time—The Creation Period.

We have NO stories of having come from somewhere else.

This has led to an atmosphere of unrest, dissatisfaction, confusion and frustration that is continuing to build momentum in this country regarding the status and future for First Nations peoples—for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a higher order tasked vision and roadmap of a fuller expression of Australia's Nationhood as we move to become a republic and develop a new foundational document that is inclusive of Australia's First Nations Peoples.

At its core it means addressing the democratic structural problem and fundamentally changing the relationship and conduct that the Australian nation has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The three pillars of **Truth, Treaty** and **Voice** are based on developments of self-determination that First Nations peoples have achieved elsewhere in the world.

Most importantly, the three pillars reflect the rights that we have won and are enshrined and protected in the articles of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which Australia ratified but continue to deny.

For many decades Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have strongly advocated for a Treaty between the Australian Parliament and ourselves.

As recently as the last 18 months, the call for a National Treaty or Treaties along with the Truth Telling mechanism, was the most dominant aspiration from the 1200 delegates that attended the three National Meetings, the 13 regional dialogues and the National Convention held at Uluru.

You might ask “**Why are a Treaty, Truth Telling and Voice the priorities**”.

Treaty—is about a political, legal, economic and social power relationship with the Australian Government where we can address our sovereign rights that have sustained our people for more than 60,000 years.

It’s a high-order debate that commands a focus on what rights are established with our existing sovereignty.

Each of the elements of a Treaty ... or treaties ... would contain a comprehensive settlement package that includes financial reparations that would re-set the relationship between the Australian government and Australia’s first peoples.

In this settlement package would be the \$35 billion Aboriginal Affairs annual budget appropriation our own portion of the GDP (~3%), just as the States and Territories receive this financial payment to deliver services.

Truth Telling

Truth-telling is about nation building. **The Uluru Statement of the Heart** has presented this nation with an opportunity to commence healing the wounds of our First Nations peoples and the historical injustices of being excluded from the democracy of this country.

“...we have been presented with an extraordinary opportunity rarely given to nations, a way of reinventing our country in a way that makes us stronger, more democratic and more inclusive”

Richard Flanagan, Aug 2018.

Truth telling will provide an opportunity for non- Indigenous peoples to acknowledge the realities of this nation's history and opens the way for honest, respectful and equal relationships into the future.

“If white can find themselves in black, as black Australia has through the Uluru Statement has sought to find itself in white, we can begin a new story – a better, richer, more sustaining and more hopeful story. To do that though, we must choose to become history's actors, all of us, because no one else will change these things for us”. Richard Flanagan: Aug 2018

Voice

In my view, the Voice model needs to meet and advance self-determination and the standards established under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

During the course of the dialogues and subsequent discussions since Uluru there is increasing support for the establishment of an Assembly of First Nations.

The Assembly of First Nations would be an elected representative body that including Stolen Generation peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living off country.

The Assembly would be independent of government with powers and political influence similar to other independent bodies such as the ACTU, Minerals Council of Australia and the Business Council of Australia.

Its purpose would be to engage and negotiate the terms of reference for the creation of the Truth Telling Commission to oversee and guide the entry in settlement agreements or treaty/treaties.

The dialogues envisaged other forms of Voices:

- self-governing entities in areas such as the Torres Straits, Cape York, Arnhem Land, the Kimberleys, and Central Australia;
- dedicated seats in parliament at the Federal, State and Territory level; and
- a seat on the productivity commission;

In light of the challenges that we all face as a nation we need to recalibrate the democracy of our civil society. We need to work collectively to call for a different paradigm for Australia's First Nations Peoples.

How will this collective mind shift occur?

Richard Flanagan provides commentary and leadership around how non-Indigenous people can participate in the discussions and debates that are needed to accept a modern Australia which would recognise our rightful place as the First peoples of this country.

He believes that the challenges that we face as a nation require us ***"...to realise that if we don't create for ourselves a liberating vision founded in the full truth of who we are as a people, we will find ourselves, in a moment of crises, suddenly entrapped in a new authoritarianism wearing the motley of the old lies."***

In 1967, 90% of the Australian population voted **Yes!** For us to be counted, and now:

We need fair minded and committed supporters to educate and convince the remaining 97% of the Australian population to say:

YES! YES! YES! To the Uluru Statement of the Heart

This is a collective responsibility of all Australians.