

Leading Issues Journal

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In this Issue

As the first year of the new millenium draws to a close, The Centre for Leadership for Women commends to you a challenging and probing critique of the Australian parliamentary system from a renowned Labor Minister who is in her fourteenth year of her parliamentary career.

Dr Carmen Lawrence, currently the Shadow Minister for Industry, Technology and Innovation, and Shadow Minister for the Status of Women, in her paper, "Renewing Democracy: Can Women Make a Difference?" presented to the Sydney Institute on August 17, 2000 leaves no stones overturned in her evaluation of the democratic processes in Australian Politics. Taking into account the concerns of a disillusioned electorate, Dr Lawrence gives us an inside account of the application of what is purported to be democratic and in the best interest of Australians - "Byzantine, power-focused behaviour of our major political parties; the disquieting alliance of our political parties with corporations and large organisations; the control of our political parties by privileged minorities; the seeming irrelevance of much parliamentary debate and political discourse in the media; the permanent state of vitriolic antagonism between the major parties; the elevation of executive secrecy above public disclosure; the winner takes all outcomes of elections which preclude the input of minority opinion; and the failure to enunciate and plan for the long term challenges we face as a community. To nominate just a few!"

Can women make a difference to transform politics? Dr Lawrence argues that women need to "articulate a detailed agenda for that reform based on an analysis of the deficiencies in our system" that women need to aim higher than simply believing, "that the mere presence of women will automatically modify our democracy and transform our Parliaments."

With the view that the responsibility to work towards a "new democracy" lies with each of us and begins with our analysis of the deficiencies in the system that governs us, you are invited to take part in the [Have Your Say topic: Evaluating Australian Politics](#)

To view the Centre's interview with Dr Carmen Lawrence please click here: [Interview with Carmen Lawrence](#)

Renewing Democracy: Can Women Make a Difference?

By Dr Carmen Lawrence

Introduction

One of the most obvious and fundamental flaws in the development of democracies everywhere has been the exclusion of women. Debate on democracy proceeded as if women were not there.

Women were belatedly included only after hard fought campaigns by the suffragists, often in the face of bitter opposition. The failure of the architects of modern (and indeed

Athenian) democracies to see women as part of "the people" was a reflection of the almost universal "verity" that women were the possessions of their husbands and fathers. Hence, like slaves, they needed no separate representation. The associated belief was that women were incapable of the rational thought needed to participate in the demos.

In the midst of the ferment of debate about equality of citizens and the emerging democracies, Mary Wollstonecraft observed that she still knew she would:

"excite laughter, by dropping a hint...that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed to them in the deliberations of government."

Some have argued that the omission of women in calls for freedom, equality and the "rights of man" was not just a "scandalous oversight" but an indication of the "relentless privileging" of men; that it is not just unfinished business but affects the very foundations of democracy. Democracy, in this view, has to be remodelled to accommodate the female half of the population.

As Anne Phillips observes, the association between equality and democracy is a recent affair and early liberals "could talk of human beings as equals without any inkling that they might all expect to vote." This failure clearly violated even the most rudimentary notions of equality.

The most powerful argument to extend the suffrage to women has always been one of simple justice: women should vote and be eligible to be elected to parliaments because they are entitled to equal rights as citizens. Added to this is the observation that all the forms and procedures of modern democracy have evolved without any significant contribution from women. Our constitution, our parliaments and our political parties were designed by men to suit their preoccupations and convenience. It follows that the full participation of women might well require and/or result in significant changes to the structures and processes of our political system.

Despite the extension of suffrage to women and their entitlement to run for Parliament, the progress toward equal representation has been glacially slow. Even now, only 22% of members and Senators are women. Perhaps because the women's movement re-emerged during the 60s when there was also a renewed enthusiasm for direct democracy, the under representation of women in parliaments did not excite much interest. In the eyes of those for whom a representative democracy was very much a second best system, getting more women into politics was a low priority. Scepticism about orthodox politics and a repudiation of the hierarchical and male dominated political parties were (and are) commonplace attitudes amongst activists. The more important issues of democracy and representation were thought to lie elsewhere.

Those who have campaigned to increase the number of women in politics often argue that women can make a unique contribution. This sometimes takes the form of an assertion that women's historical and continuing subordination gives them "privileged access to the truth." Less ambitiously, many women want more women MPs because they expect that women are more likely to understand the problems they face. Australian research shows that women are seen as more likely to be in touch with the needs and interests of the average person.

Many women have pressed and continue to press their claims for greater representation because they see themselves as bringing new qualities to the political stage. They believe they "will not only add to the dramatis personae but of necessity alter the play."

It has been argued, for example, that since women's exclusion has arisen in part from conventions that distinguish sharply between the public and private, women will necessarily bring these issues to the foreground of public debate, eg. concern for the young, sick, old and disabled, the removal of discrimination based on status and the grounding of the abstractions of economic or foreign policy in more compassionate understanding of people's daily lives.

Some have held out the promise that women will radicalise the very practices of democracy: that they will cut through the "pomposity" of male rhetoric; subvert unnecessary hierarchies; open up decision making to those who were once the objects of policy and ensure a more responsive and open system. While there is a Utopian flavour to all this, it reflects many of the same aspirations that I hear every day from people who are said to be sceptics about the possibility of reforming our political system.

There is hope that when a sufficient number of women is elected, their "critical mass" will produce a qualitative change in political life. Women will no longer be forced to "adapt to their surroundings, conforming to the predominant rules of the game" and may bring a more sceptical viewpoint to the assessment of our political institutions and practices.

In general, when these arguments rest on the assumption that the mere presence of women will automatically modify our democracy and transform our Parliaments; change is seen as inevitably flowing from the different experiences and sensibilities of women. While there are good reasons to advocate reform and while women, as outsiders and newcomers, may well be in the best position to see what is needed, I doubt whether the mere presence of women will prove sufficient. We need to articulate a detailed agenda for that reform based on an analysis of the deficiencies in our system.

Can we improve our democracy?

Whatever its origin, or its validity, the perception that more women will make a difference reflects a conviction that our political system needs to change; that the fundamentals of the democratic contract have been corrupted. Many Australians I talk to are disgruntled by a system which does not appear to respond to their needs and seems, increasingly, to be in the hands of elites more interested in their own advancement than the general good. As a result, our political system has less and less legitimacy.

Others have characterised this as a crisis which ranges across many of our democratic institutions and processes: our outdated constitution; the Byzantine, power-focused behaviour of our major political parties; the disquieting alliance of our political parties with corporations and large organisations; the control of our political parties by privileged minorities; the seeming irrelevance of much parliamentary debate and political discourse in the media; the permanent state of vitriolic antagonism between the major parties; the elevation of executive secrecy above public disclosure; the winner takes all outcomes of elections which preclude the input of minority opinion; and the failure to enunciate and plan for the long term challenges we face as a community. To nominate just a few!

Amongst the pessimists, this disenchantment spills over into disparagement of government action and a retreat into individual solutions to social and economic problems. This, of course, suits the neoliberal agenda but is anathema to effective joint action necessary to reduce inequality, improve broad social outcomes and to protect the environment. Fortunately, there are optimists who believe it is possible to redesign our institutions. However, it is ironic that in an era which glorifies the novel and worships change, the same politicians who advocate flexibility and reform cling to conventions and practices which always had design flaws and which have ossified into caricatures of themselves.

Whether or not the greater involvement of women in our political system will drive improvements in our political system, it is clear that they are needed.

Representation: One vote, one value?

The minimum requirement of any representative democracy is that governments should be elected and that all adults should have an equal right to vote. This minimum is indeed very little. As Rousseau acerbically observed:

"The English people believes itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of Parliament; as soon as the members are elected, the people is enslaved; it is nothing"

We might well ask what kind of accountability it is that operates only once every three or four years and which depends on assessments of performance which are inevitably based on information which the government of the day chooses to make available.

That said, it is fundamental even with our circumscribed democracy that all votes should be of equal value. In broad terms this has been achieved in Australia, with universal suffrage, electorates of roughly equal size and independent electoral commissions to determine electoral boundaries and prevent gerrymandering. However, in my own State, entrenched conservative opposition in the Upper House has made it impossible to achieve one vote one value and a High Court case to force the issue constitutionally did not succeed. The latest figures show that the largest metropolitan seat Wanneroo has 36,000 voters (42% over the quotient of 25,400) while the smallest country seat has just under 9,700 (a 4:1 weighting). The legislative application of differential quotas to metropolitan and country seats means that the average vote weighting is two to one in the Assembly. No action has been taken to remedy this inequality despite the recommendation of the 1992 Royal Commission into the Commercial Activities that the Assembly should be constituted on the basis of "as close to equal value in the votes of electors as is practicable." Given the intransigence of the conservatives in Western Australia, the only remedy may lie in a Bill of Rights enshrining equal votes for all.

Despite the otherwise general equality in voting power, many are suspicious that not all citizens are equally able to influence their representatives. This breeds cynicism and a belief that the ordinary voter's needs and views are ignored, while preference is given to the interests of the wealthy, to big business and to political cronies.

Several features of our political system contribute to these attitudes. Substantial campaign donations to the major parties by corporations and large organisations such as unions and business foundations foster the perception (and perhaps the reality) that it is possible to buy privileged access to MPs and ministers and that this influence is in proportion to the amount

of money donated. The recent disclosure that business leaders paid \$10,000 per head for dinner at the Lodge indicates that not even the Prime Minister's office is free of this practice.

Like many Australians, I am perturbed at these tendencies. We run the risk of becoming a "corporate democracy" in which the number of shares you have purchased in the party of your choice determines your effective voting power. While there has been extensive debate about big money in politics in the U.S., there appears to be a conspiracy of silence on the issues among Australian politicians.

Public funding of elections was supposed to reduce the parties' reliance on private corporate and union donations: all that has happened is a blowout in both public (doubled since 1993) and private funding as parties engage in an increasingly expensive bidding war at elections. Figures collated by the Parliamentary Library show that in the 1998-99 financial year, which included that last election, \$37 million was paid to the parties by corporations and by unions. Although disclosure laws require the sources of these funds to be identified, there are still loopholes. These include dressing up donations as loans and making them through "foundations", dummy trusts and celebrity fundraising dinners which do not identify individual donors.

The substantive problem is the possibility that such donations can purchase influence. While I know of no comparable Australian data, surveys of major corporate donors in the U.S. (some of whom donate in Australia) show that they do so not because of charitable impulses or civic duty – they expect a return for their money. A Business Week/ Harris Poll surveyed 400 senior executives from large public corporations to explore their reasons for donating to political parties. Over half nominated securing access to lawmakers to ensure consideration of matters affecting their businesses as the main reason. A further 27% indicated that gaining access was at least part of their rationale, while 58% nominated losing influence to the unions or to environmental organisations as a relevant consideration. A worrying 41% said that at least part of the reason they made political donations was to the hope of receiving "preferential consideration on regulations or legislation benefiting our business."

I believe it is time to reign in the exponential growth of corporate donations and to curtail the proliferation of content free, coercive media advertising that passes for policy debate during elections. The retention of public funding of elections should be accompanied by measures to limit the size of individual private donations to \$1500, or thereabouts, and to proscribe any donations from corporations and large organisations. An extension of free-to-air radio and television could accompany these changes.

Mirror or descriptive representation

Part of the growing sense of disenfranchisement about politics amongst Australians may lie in the obvious differences between party members and MPs and the wider community. This failure of "mirror" or "descriptive" representation is, of course, most noticeable in the relative absence of women in the senior echelons of the major parties and in the Parliament.

What kind of representation is it where the candidates are not even remotely typical of the wider society, even using crude indicators such as: age, gender, income and occupation. For example, one in three of the House of Representatives liberal members trained as lawyers

(22/64), with preference given to those who have a family trust or two. These discrepancies contribute to the sense of mistrust. Voters need to feel that their representatives – at least in aggregate - can understand their circumstances and have sufficient identity with them to press their interests. The greater the distance of representatives from electors, the greater the mistrust.

These weaknesses begin with the political parties who determine who will be presented to the community for election and govern the behaviour of their members in law making.

None of the parties in the Australian political system is a mass party with a substantial membership base: less than 1% of Australians are members of a political party. Nor are their members typical. In general, factions within the parties control the branches and manoeuvre for control of seats or regions which then become their fiefdoms – new members which they do not control are a threat. Candidates for safe and winnable seats are then chosen from within the group which controls the area; serious contests are rare, although factions sometimes test their support in full-scale combat. We are seeing something of this in NSW at the moment in the contest between John Fahey and Albie Schultz following a redistribution of boundaries. Contests for marginal and unwinnable seats are left to the naïve - or to women. This was one of the reasons we pushed to hard to change the ALP's rules to secure safe and winnable seats – at least up to 35%.

It is no secret that real (as opposed to stacked or phantom) membership of all parties is declining. This is a global phenomenon which is also evident in fewer people identifying with the major political parties. Some have argued that this loosening of political ties stems from an increasing resistance to ideology and the greater appeal of single-issue politics. Whatever the reasons, there is no question that the parties themselves have contributed to the view that they are in the thrall of special interest groups.

There are almost daily revelations of people being signed up to parties without their knowledge or wheeled out only when critical votes are taken (usually about selecting candidates) for election. The current row amongst the Liberals in Ryan and the Labor spat over Isaacs are examples. In W.A. there have been claims that some recruits' signatures on their application for membership of the Liberal party were actually forged.

While I do not intend to single out my own party for criticism, it is clear that unions – honourable contributors to Labor history and policy- exercise disproportionate influence through the 60:40 rule and through their affiliated membership, many of whom have no direct connection to the party. One vote, one value – the prime condition for a democracy - is not observed in the party's rules. Not only does this rob us of the active commitment and participation of union members, it also disenfranchises ordinary branch members (many of whom are women) who are active in their own right. It means they can be overwhelmed by solid blocks of disciplined votes. They often resent this.

I believe it's time for the ALP to embark on a massive campaign to increase active membership, particularly amongst young people. It is time for the party to insist on one form of membership – that of individuals who take responsibility for their own membership, including paying for it. As a first step, only individuals should be permitted to sign up as members and everyone's vote should have the same value. I'm told that in the U.K when Thatcher moved to prohibit union affiliation fees being paid to the Labour Party, workers responded by joining in droves, providing a solid non-factional foundation for Blair's "New Labour" as well as a surge in funds.

There is no reason why similar results couldn't be achieved here. Members who sign up as individuals are more likely to commit energy and enthusiasm to an organisation they have chosen. Eliminating branch stacking, a process that has already begun in the ALP, may also help divert the considerable energies currently dissipated in turf wars and internal machinations to policy development, community activism and political strategy. It may also produce greater diversity of real membership.

Parliament – debates, legislation, consultation, accountability

Once elected, MPs may find that their contribution and that of the parliament as a whole is much more limited than the theories of representative government suggest. It is fair to say that, even with the expanding contribution made by the Senate Committee system, executive domination remains a hallmark of Australian politics. This too may have contributed to the alienation of voters.

The author of a Parliamentary Library report, compiled as part of the Centenary of Federation celebrations, concluded that " the domination of the Parliament by a disciplined bipolar party system meant that the House of Representatives came to be seen at worst as a theatre of meaningless ritual and at best as an institution under the foot of the Executive." Although she politely places her observations beyond contemporary politics, the view is one that is often repeated today.

The novice MP is often the best source of insight into the strengths and weaknesses of our Parliamentary system. I remember feeling as if I was suffering from brain rot. As a former academic accustomed to hearing tight argument supported by evidence, the empty nature of much parliamentary debate came as a shock. Talking to some of our new members, it is clear that parliamentary processes still produce a sense of unreality.

One of the more disquieting experiences in the Federal Parliament is that most speeches are delivered without an audience, into the void. Speech after carefully prepared speech disappears without a trace having no impact on the fate of the legislation. This, in the House of Representatives, is determined in advance by the simple arithmetic of majority. Even in the Senate, where outcomes are more fluid, deals are done behind closed doors rather than fleshed out in public. As one visitor to the U.S. Congress observed: "Congress is so strange. A man gets up to speak and says nothing. Nobody listens. And then everybody disagrees."

In each of the last three parliaments, approximately 10,000 speeches were given but no real debates were held. What passes as debate is actually a series of unrelated speeches, often canvassing the same arguments without reference to those of other speakers. Over 600 Bills were considered in the House of Representatives between 1996 and 1998. Somewhat less than a third of these were considered in detail at the committee stage. Because of the sheer volume of legislation, most members are unaware of the detailed provisions of legislation. As David Marquand, a former U.K. parliamentarian and academic observed, parliamentary life is one of "feverish inconsequence."

This is particularly true of the House of Representatives where there is almost no opportunity for individual members (or even the opposition en bloc) to introduce or modify legislation. Scrutiny of the Executive is limited to the charade that is Question Time, when no questions are answered. Committees in the Lower House, while they often inquire into matters of great significance, have no capacity to quiz ministers and bureaucrats about

budgets and legislation. Some of our brightest and best are effectively excluded from the tasks they were elected to perform.

While most MPs I have met are conscientious, they are largely unable to influence the legislative or policy agenda except behind the closed doors of the party rooms. Even then, there is often little room to manoeuvre because decisions have already been made by the executives. Matters which deserve free and open consideration are often submerged because of anxiety about dissent. The media feeds this paranoia by portraying even the most minor disagreements as tests of leadership or signs of party disintegration.

While the Parliament often seeks the views of the community and of experts in various fields, most of this contribution occurs in committees whose deliberations and conclusions are ignored. A treasure trove of thoughtful and meticulously prepared submissions and reports languish in countless bottom drawers.

On a broader front, members of the wider community are pressing for greater involvement in decision making while their representatives, especially in government appear to be moving in the opposite direction, involving fewer and fewer people, with less and less public scrutiny of the development of public policy.

Aspirations by voters for greater participation are often quashed by the claim that further democratisation/ participation is not desirable because the people are too ill informed or too irrational to be trusted with power. This at a time when the community is better educated than at any time in the past.

It is possible to do much better, to open up decision making, to involve more MPs and engage the wider community, to actually thrash out the issues in real debates. Australia was once considered the "democratic laboratory" of the world. It's time to conduct a few new experiments to revive our body politic and embrace the principles of openness, accessibility and accountability.

As a start we could:

- As in the new Scottish Parliament, establish an all party Business Committee to determine the business of the Parliament including the allocation of business to committees. The Committee would require regular endorsement of the Parliament for its plans.
- Amend standing orders to require that a greater proportion of parliamentary time is devoted to non-government business;
- Ensure that legislation introduced by the Executive undergoes a substantial period of pre-legislative development and consultation through the relevant committees, interest groups and the general public;
- Give committees the power to initiate legislation arising from their inquiries, especially if the government has failed to respond to major recommendations;
- Establish joint estimates and legislation committees with the power to question public servants and ministers from either House and to take submissions and commission independent research;

- Limit the number of speakers on legislation and change the standing orders to ensure that a real debate occurs with members from both sides to provide a quorum;
- Devote the second chamber to a more extensive deliberation of the bills in committee;
- Provide for private bills which allow private citizens or groups (with sufficient backing) to bring certain matters before the Parliament (probably through sponsoring MPs);
- Require that all petitions be investigated, if necessary by special hearings, of a dedicated petitions' committee;
- Commission citizens' juries or deliberative polls on contentious and complex issues;

- Invite expert and community representatives to address the chamber in session and engage in debate with members;
- Promote and sponsor the establishment of groups such as civic and youth forums to enable more regular and efficient consultation with the public;

- Strengthen freedom of information legislation to reduce the number of exemptions from disclosure.

As well as engaging the general public and their representatives more fully in the democratic process, I believe such initiatives could transform politics in the way that many women have dreamed about; into a more engaged and active democracy. The goals of greater participation, more civil and co-operative parliamentary conduct and an informed public debate are worth striving for. Policy development could be more widely shared and it could be a more consensual enterprise, the atmosphere of the parliament could be less reflexly adversarial and we could all become more focused on solving the problems we face as a nation. We need a project for a new democracy.

Leading Issues Journal

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In this Issue

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, on 7 December 2000, presented to Prime Minister, John Howard and the Commonwealth Parliament its final report, "Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge." 1 January 2001, will mark the end of the life of the Council that was established as a statutory authority on 2 September 1991. To acknowledge the Council's leadership and extensive achievements, both tangible and intangible, over the nine years of its existence, the Centre for Leadership for Women dedicates this final Issue for the year 2000, to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

In its last term of operation, in August and September 2000, as reported in its final report, the Council for the first time wrote to about 22,000 business and community organisations and individuals, to see how they responded to the national reconciliation documents. The survey asked respondents to indicate: Their activities in relation to reconciliation before the release of the documents; their acceptance of and commitment to the documents themselves; the actions they had already undertaken and those they planned in response to the documents; and the effect they expected these actions would have. By the deadline of 25 October, Council had received almost 1,000 responses, from a wide cross section of people surveyed. Of the local governments that responded, 25% indicated that they had developed agreements with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Business indicated an 18% response rate to developing agreements with the mining sector being particularly strong in this regard. The Council had hoped for a higher response rate, but recognised that numbers would have been limited by the short time for response. It also recognised that as the responses came from city and country areas of all States and Territories, they represent a reasonable cross-section of the Australian community.

As evident by the trends indicated by this sample survey, it is clear that there is still much to be done towards reconciliation. Reconciliation Australia, an independent foundation established by the Council will take over from 1 January 2001 to continue the reconciliation process. However, it is increasingly apparent that if a reconciled Australia is to become a reality, it is ultimately 'up to us'. With this focus, the Centre presents to you a list of selected sections from the Council's final report, "Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge."

(All the information below has been reproduced courtesy of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation)

Background to the Act establishing the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

The preamble to the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991* sets out some of the reasons for, and circumstances surrounding, the enactment of the legislation. The preamble reads:

Because:

(a) Australia was occupied by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who had settled for thousands of years, before British settlement at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788; and

(b) many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders suffered dispossession and dispersal from their traditional lands by the British Crown; and

(c) to date, there has been no formal process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians; and

(d) by the year 2001, the centenary of Federation, it is most desirable that there be such a reconciliation; and

(e) as part of the reconciliation process, the Commonwealth will seek an ongoing national commitment from governments at all levels to cooperate and to coordinate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission as appropriate to address progressively Aboriginal disadvantage and aspirations in relation to land, housing, law and justice, cultural heritage, education, employment, health, infrastructure, economic development and any other relevant matters in the decade leading to the centenary of Federation, 2001.

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Conclusions 'of the decade of reconciliation' by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

Chapter 9 Conclusions, "Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge" December 2000

In reflecting on the experience and outcomes of 'the decade of reconciliation' - a unique process in this nation's history - the Council wishes to place on record some conclusions. We do so to assist Australia's continuing journey towards reconciliation. Our declaration states '...many steps have been taken, many steps remain...'

As the body charged with promoting and overseeing the formal process established by Parliament, the Council and its members have been privileged to take part in that unique experience. Usually, only practice and experience can tell us the validity of what we are trying to do, and the value of what we are trying to achieve.

So we have drawn the following conclusions and principles from the work of the Council and of the tens of thousands of people who have actively engaged with the complex process of reconciliation.

We hope that these will assist all those who wish to take reconciliation forward in the years

ahead.

An idea whose time had come

1. The Parliament's unified decision to launch a formal reconciliation process was the right decision at the right time.
2. Cross-party support for the process and for Council's work was and remains an essential element of success.
3. The time was right for the process to begin, and all Australians can take heart from the positive outcomes so far.
4. Nevertheless, a decade was a short time to address the legacies of 200 years of history, and much remains to be done.
5. The many People's Walks for Reconciliation during and after Corroboree 2000, involving hundreds of thousands, could not have been predicted when the process began.
6. Similarly, nor could the historic achievement of bringing together on the first day of Corroboree 2000 all heads of government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, and representatives of peak bodies and sectors, to support the Council's Vision of reconciliation while openly acknowledging differences on the way forward.
7. The acknowledgment during the Sydney 2000 Olympics and Paralympics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the recognition of their cultures and contributions could not have occurred without the reconciliation process.

A foundation of broad support

8. The overwhelming majority of Australians generally support reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.
9. There is broad agreement that reconciliation is vital for Australia's future as a mature, harmonious nation.
10. The decade has seen a major shift in attitudes, with reconciliation moving from a little-understood concept to a key item on the national agenda coming up to the centenary of Federation.

Diversity within an agreed framework

11. However, people differ on exactly what reconciliation means and how to achieve it.
12. Much of this is a healthy diversity - different views are not necessarily mutually exclusive.
13. The tasks of reconciliation will vary according to local needs and circumstances.
14. It is important to establish an agreed framework for this healthy diversity.

15. Council believes that its two reconciliation documents (the *Declaration* and the *Roadmap*) provide such a framework.

Division on some key issues

16. While Australians overwhelmingly support reconciliation and support many propositions in the Council's documents, they are evenly divided on other issues.

17. For example, despite overwhelming evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most disadvantaged Australians, almost half the Australian people believe that they are not disadvantaged.

Opposition, discrimination and racism

18. Ignorance, apathy, resistance and opposition still exist in parts of the wider community about reconciliation and the need to overcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

19. For that matter, not all Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are convinced about the process. Some ask why should they reconcile when they've done nothing wrong - the wrongs have been done to them.

20. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also remain unconvinced about how reconciliation can improve employment, education and housing outcomes and make a difference to their daily life circumstances.

21. Despite major advances, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders often still face prejudice when trying to rent a home, find a job, hire a taxi, get service in shops and banks, and when doing the simple everyday things that most Australians take for granted.

22. Public awareness and education about such issues remains a key task of reconciliation.

23. Continuing acute disadvantage, discrimination and racism suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remains the biggest challenge for reconciliation.

Not a foregone conclusion

24. For these and other reasons, true and lasting reconciliation is not a foregone conclusion.

25. Reconciliation is hard work - it's a long, winding and corrugated road, not a broad, paved highway.

26. Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality.

Elements for success

27. **Consultation** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, other stakeholders, and the broad community, has been essential to get this far, and will be essential to going

further.

28. Consultation has helped identify key issues, find common ground, and develop suitable approaches for going forward.

29. It is critical to listen and hear, not just talk, and to follow up with action.

30. It is important to talk *with* each other, not *past, to* or *for* each other.

31. Successful consultation requires mutual respect and understanding, recognising local protocols, and preparedness to adapt to different customs and cultures.

32. Partnerships based on equality and cooperation are also essential.

33. Working together, people can identify the issues and solve them.

34. Many inspiring examples demonstrate the value of partnerships in practice.

35. Education is crucial for the future of reconciliation, in many senses.

36. Better educational outcomes for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are essential to ensure equality of opportunity with other Australians.

37. The education system should also provide all Australians with the opportunity to learn about our shared history.

38. Some Council members were surprised during major consultations to hear so many people ask 'How come we didn't know about this before?' when discussing our history.

39. Our experience is that understanding of history helps to bring mutual respect and recognition of the diversity of our society.

40. Governments and leaders in all sections of society should also take responsibility for raising public awareness about reconciliation issues through community education.

41. The media has a particular responsibility to provide objective coverage and information.

42. **A strong grassroots people's movement** is the key to ensuring that reconciliation becomes a reality in all aspects of the nation's life and identity.

43. The people's movement has already demonstrated the powerful momentum of reconciliation.

44. It has shown that individuals can make a difference, and produced many advocates for reconciliation.

45. Actions in local communities and organisations are changing things at the local level.

Things which remain to be done

46. While celebrating its progress towards reconciliation, Australia must also acknowledge that outstanding issues remain to be resolved between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.

47. Reconciliation requires overcoming differences in social and economic outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

48. A framework for doing this has been outlined in Council's strategies for overcoming disadvantage and achieving economic independence, contained in the *Roadmap for Reconciliation*, and more detailed ways of implementing these strategies are provided in companion booklets.

49. Reconciliation also requires a formal resolution of issues which were never addressed when this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent.

50. To achieve such a formal resolution through an agreement or treaty will require much public discussion and understanding, as well as consultations and negotiations in good faith between all parties.

51. Any such formal settlement will also need to address the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in regard to their rights both as Australian citizens and as Indigenous peoples.

52. In the *Roadmap for Reconciliation*, Council has outlined a strategy to promote recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, and a more detailed booklet explains the issues and how they might be addressed.

53. Council believes that the Commonwealth Parliament should legislate to establish a framework for negotiating the resolution of outstanding issues, and has provided a possible draft of such legislation (see Appendix 3).

Sustaining the process

54. With so much achieved and a framework established, the reconciliation process must now go on to do the things which remain to be done.

55. Council's *National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation process* outlines a framework for how to do this, and a companion booklet provides more detailed suggestions.

56. Sustaining the reconciliation process will require commitment and action at all levels and in all sections of the Australian community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

57. This includes specific organisations and networks at the grass roots - without which the people's movement cannot continue.

58. The Council believes that it will also require a specific body - a foundation - to provide a national focus and national leadership in working towards reconciliation.

59. Therefore, in discussion with a range of stakeholders, the Council has established an

independent foundation, **Reconciliation Australia** , which will carry on these tasks from 1 January 2001.

Final Recommendations by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

(Chapter 10 Final Recommendations, "Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge" December 2000)

After a very extensive public consultation process, the Council drew up two documents of reconciliation: the *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation* and the *Roadmap for Reconciliation* . At Corroboree 2000 on 27 May 2000, it presented these to the Prime Minister, other national leaders, and the nation as a whole.

The Council earlier advised the Prime Minister that these documents represented its formal recommendations to him as Minister in relation to the 'nature and content' of documents of reconciliation under paragraph 6(1)(h) of the Act.

Paragraph 6(1)(h) of the Act also requires the Council to make recommendations to the Minister in relation to the 'manner of giving effect' to such documents. In relation to the 'manner of giving effect to' the above reconciliation documents, the Council presents the following recommendations.

1. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agree to implement and monitor a national framework whereby all governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) work to overcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' disadvantage through setting program performance benchmarks that are measurable (including timelines), are agreed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, and are publicly reported.
2. All parliaments and local governments pass formal motions of support for the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation and the Roadmap for Reconciliation, enshrine their basic principles in appropriate legislation, and determine how their key recommendations can best be implemented in their jurisdictions.
3. The Commonwealth Parliament prepare legislation for a referendum which seeks to:
 - recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia in a new preamble to the Constitution; and
 - remove section 25 of the Constitution and introduce a new section making it unlawful to adversely discriminate against any people on the grounds of race.
4. Recognising that the formal reconciliation process over the last decade has achieved much and has helped bring Australians together, all levels of government, non-government, business, peak bodies, communities and individuals commit themselves to continuing the process and sustaining it by:
 - affirming the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation and actioning the Roadmap for Reconciliation;
 - providing resources for reconciliation activities and involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their work;

- undertaking educational and public-awareness activities to help improve understanding and relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community; and
- supporting Reconciliation Australia, the foundation which has been established to maintain a national leadership focus for reconciliation, report on progress, provide information and raise funds to promote and support reconciliation.

5. Each government and parliament:

- recognise that this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent and that to advance reconciliation it would be most desirable if there were agreements or treaties; and
- negotiate a process through which this might be achieved that protects the political, legal, cultural and economic position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

6. That the Commonwealth Parliament enact legislation (for which the Council has provided a draft in this report) to put in place a process which will unite all Australians by way of an agreement, or treaty, through which unresolved issues of reconciliation can be resolved.

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NATIONAL RECONCILIATION DOCUMENTS:

The Council ceremonially presented its two reconciliation documents to national leaders and the Australian people at Corroboree 2000. They are the *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation* and the *Roadmap for Reconciliation*. Below is the *Declaration* and the four national strategies from the *Roadmap*.

("Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge" December 2000)

Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation

We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation.

We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters.

We recognise this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent.

Reaffirming the human rights of all Australians, we respect and recognise continuing customary laws, beliefs and traditions.

Through understanding the spiritual relationship between the land and its first peoples, we share our future and live in harmony.

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

Reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians. Many steps have been taken, many steps remain as we learn our shared histories.

As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives.

We desire a future where all Australians enjoy their rights, accept their responsibilities, and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, overcome disadvantage, and respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination within the life of the nation.

Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

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Roadmap for Reconciliation

("Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge" December 2000)

1. The National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process

The National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process sets out ways to build on progress towards reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community after the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation completes its term.

These measures address practical, cultural and spiritual dimensions of reconciliation.

Essential actions include:

LEADERSHIP FOR THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS

- All levels of government, the private sector, community and voluntary organisations publicly support the ongoing reconciliation process, provide resources and increasingly involve Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in their work.
- A foundation, Reconciliation Australia, is established to maintain a national leadership focus for reconciliation, report on progress, provide information and raise funds to promote and support reconciliation activities.
- State, Territory and local reconciliation groups, involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from the wider community, lead and support action that promotes reconciliation.
- Australian parliaments and political parties address the low level of Indigenous representation in the political system.

EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION

- Schools, tertiary education institutions and employers require and support the culturally appropriate teaching of the truth of Australia's history that includes

Indigenous perspectives and addresses racism.

- The media feature stories that promote reconciliation and challenge racist stereotyping.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR RECONCILIATION

- Communities celebrate significant dates and events and take joint action to achieve agreed reconciliation goals.

PROTOCOL AND CEREMONY

- All parliaments, governments and organisations observe protocols and negotiate with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders or representative bodies to include appropriate Indigenous ceremony into official events.

SYMBOLS OF RECONCILIATION

- Governments, organisations and communities negotiate to establish and promote symbols of reconciliation. This would include changing the date of Australia Day to a date that includes all Australians.

FORMAL RECOGNITION OF THE DOCUMENTS OF RECONCILIATION

- All parliaments and local governments pass formal motions of support for the documents of reconciliation.

2. The National Strategy to Promote Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights

This strategy proposes a number of actions, including some constitutional and legislative processes, to assist the progressive resolution of outstanding issues for the recognition and enjoyment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights. It aims to ensure:

- that all Australians enjoy, in daily life, a fundamental equality of rights, opportunities and acceptance of responsibilities; and
- the status and unique identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia, and achieve recognition, respect and understanding in the wider community.

Essential actions include:

EDUCATION

- Governments and their agencies, legal, cultural and educational institutions, Indigenous organisations, and the media work together to improve community awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples with distinct cultures, rights and status.

LEGISLATION

- All governments take steps to ensure the recognition and protection of Indigenous intellectual property as already occurs in some Commonwealth legislation.
- All governments ensure their policies and practices observe Australia's international Indigenous and human rights obligations.
- State and Territory governments consider giving magistrates and judges the discretion to take account of traditional laws in sentencing, as already occurs in some circumstances in the Northern Territory.
- Governments establish legislative processes to deal with the 'unfinished business' of reconciliation, allowing for negotiated outcomes on matters such as Indigenous rights, self-determination within the life of the nation, and constitutional reform.

AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION

- Government agencies, legal institutions and educational organisations develop and promote community awareness about the Constitution and its application in protecting the rights of all Australians.
- Within the broader context of future constitutional reform, the Commonwealth Parliament enacts legislation for a referendum which seeks to:
 - prepare a new preamble to the Constitution which recognises the status of the first Australians; and
 - **remove section 25 of the Constitution and introduce a new section making it unlawful to adversely discriminate against any people on the grounds of race.**

3. The National Strategy to Overcome Disadvantage

The National Strategy to Overcome Disadvantage aims for a society where Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders enjoy a similar standard of living to that of other Australians, without losing their cultural identity.

This strategy focuses on education, employment, health, housing, law and justice. Priority must be given to achieving comparable outcomes in health and education. Improvement in these areas is critical to advancing reconciliation. It is important that no person is disadvantaged by the inability of governments and service providers to communicate and cooperate in the delivery of services.

Essential actions include:

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

- The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) evaluates and updates its National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, agreeing on a framework for all governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to:
 - set program performance benchmarks that are measurable, include timelines and are agreed in partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities;
 - ensure they have the information systems necessary to monitor performance; and
 - annually report their performance to parliaments, councils and their constituents against these benchmarks.

- Every five years, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission works with ATSIC to prepare an independent report on the nation's progress in addressing disadvantage.

PARTNERSHIPS AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- Peak business and community groups make commitments to overcome disadvantage, and encourage their members to make similar commitments.
- Services are designed and delivered in a way that is driven by local Indigenous people, strengthens local communities, and forges social coalitions and equal partnerships, drawing on and building the skills and resources of the community.
- Service providers, ATSIC and governments identify and eliminate systemic discrimination and racism, beginning with a review of their own practices.
- Governments adopt funding arrangements that are flexible and sufficient to meet local needs, and enable the pooling of funds across agencies and between the different levels of government.
- Employers link performance-based salaries in all sectors to improvements in Indigenous outcomes, where appropriate.

COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Indigenous communities, families and individuals take more responsibility for addressing the causes and consequences of disadvantage within their control.
- All Australians accept the responsibility to learn more about the causes and extent of disadvantage and reject racism and related behaviour.

4. The National Strategy for Economic Independence

The National Strategy for Economic Independence aims for a society where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities can share the same levels of economic independence as the wider community.

For most Australians, pathways to economic independence include getting a job and/or running a business.

In both of these cases, an education substantially improves the likelihood of success.

This strategy is not for everyone. For some, economic independence will be defined in terms of their traditional economy and lifestyle.

Essential actions include:

ACCESS TO JOBS AND RESOURCES

- All employers establish strategies for employing and training more Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.
- Banks and other financial institutions actively adopt culturally-responsive banking and financing regimes and facilitate better access to capital.
- Governments increase the value of Indigenous assets by legislating for Indigenous intellectual property and cultural rights and by working in partnership with

Indigenous communities to protect biodiversity and rehabilitate and sustain lands and waters under the control of those communities.

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS PRACTICES

- Indigenous people and communities develop their existing competitive advantages in respect of their cultural assets and special knowledge of the land and the environment.
- Governments, ATSIC, and the private sector all research and develop successful business models that can be applied in regional and remote communities. Priority should be given to developing commercial activities on Indigenous-owned land.
- Private-sector organisations seek opportunities for joint ventures with Indigenous businesses. Governments promote such joint ventures.
- Governments and industry work in partnership with Indigenous communities to ensure their projects strengthen Indigenous communities by supporting the local economy and enhancing regional employment opportunities.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Schools, TAFEs, universities and other education providers, working with families, develop and implement flexible programs to improve student attendance, retention rates, academic results and career pathways.
- TAFEs and other vocational education providers target their programs to the employment opportunities in the local labour market, aiming for available jobs or business opportunities on the completion of training programs and schemes.
- With local community involvement, education providers, banks and other financial institutions develop money-management programs that increase the capacity of people to plan, save and invest in their future.
- Indigenous leaders actively encourage their people to equip themselves with the skills, knowledge and experiences that are valued in the local employment market.

A Timeline of Reconciliation

("Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge" December 2000)

1837: Saxe Bannister, first Attorney General of New South Wales, makes a submission to the Select Committee of the House of Commons arguing that treaties should be entered into with Aboriginal people and that their rights to land should be respected.

January 1938: The Aborigines Progressive Association declared a Day of Mourning on Australia Day and held the first Aborigines Conference in Sydney. The Conference resolved to appeal to the nation to give Indigenous Australians full citizenship rights.

1963 The Yolngu people of Yirrkala send a bark petition to Federal Parliament protesting about the government's decision to grant a bauxite mining lease on their traditional land. Parliament sets up a bipartisan committee to investigate the grievances, which subsequently acknowledges the people's moral right to their lands.

1965 The Freedom Riders undertake a 3,200 km bus tour of northern NSW drawing public

attention to the racism, discrimination and social disadvantage endured by Aboriginal people.

1966 The Gurindji people at Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory, led by elder Vincent Lingiari, stage a walk-off and extensive strike for better wages and living conditions leading to a demand for return of their traditional lands. Traditional land is handed back in 1975.

1967: Referendum sees 92 per cent of Australians vote to give the Commonwealth government power to legislate for Aboriginal people and to allow them to be counted in the Census.

1970 The Yirrkala people launch legal action against the mining company Nabalco and the Commonwealth in the NT Supreme Court (*Milirrpum v Nabalco and the Commonwealth*). The judge decides against them, ruling that communal Aboriginal title to land was a concept not recognised in Australian law.

1971 Neville Thomas Bonner becomes the first Aboriginal parliamentarian following his election as Senator for Queensland. A loyal Liberal, he crossed the floor on several occasions to vote on Aboriginal issues.

1972 On Australia Day Aboriginal people erect the Tent Embassy on the lawns outside Parliament House, Canberra, drawing attention to their feeling that they are 'foreigners in their own country so long as they have no legal freehold title to any part of Australia.'

1972: Prime Minister William McMahon makes an important statement signalling a major change from the old assimilation policy. The statement sets out a number of policy objectives, including the equal right of Aborigines 'to hold effective and respected places within one Australian society'. At the same time, they were to be encouraged to preserve and develop their own culture.

1972: The Whitlam Government establishes the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and makes a firm commitment to the policy of self-determination. The new Government also sets up the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee.

1973 Commissioned by the Commonwealth Government, the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission, headed by A E Woodward, examines matters related to Aboriginal land and its two reports recommend ways of recognising Aboriginal title.

1975: The Australian Senate unanimously endorses a resolution put up by Senator Neville Bonner acknowledging prior ownership of this country by Aboriginal people and seeking compensation for their dispossession. Federal Parliament passes the Racial Discrimination Act.

1976 Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls appointed Governor of South Australia, following a lengthy career in sport and community work and his investiture as a Knight at Buckingham Palace in 1972.

1976: The Fraser Government effects the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act and brings the new legislation into operation.

1978: Dr H. C. Coombes initiates movement towards a treaty with Indigenous Australians.

1979: The Aboriginal Treaty Committee is formed and the National Aboriginal Conference calls for a treaty between the Commonwealth government and Aboriginal people. The Hon. Fred Chaney, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, welcomes the initiative and funds a nationwide consultation process.

1986: Pope John Paul II visits Alice Springs and makes a public statement saying 'There is a need for a just and proper settlement (with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) that still lies unachieved in Australia.'

1987: Aboriginal Affairs Minister Gerry Hand presents to the Parliament the statement *Foundations for the Future*, aimed at progressing the idea of a compact with Indigenous Australians.

1988 The Barunga Statement, written on bark and presented to the Prime Minister at the annual Barunga cultural and sporting festival, calls for Aboriginal self-management, a national system of land rights and recognition of Aboriginal rights.

1988: Australian Heads of Churches issue a statement, *Towards Reconciliation in Australian Society - Reconciliation and Aboriginal Australians*, arguing for just and proper settlement of differences and the healing of division.

1990 The Commonwealth Government establishes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to develop and administer Aboriginal policy and programs. Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue is the first chairperson.

1990: New Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner announces Government's intention of seeking greater cross-party agreement on Aboriginal Affairs.

January 1991: Minister Tickner releases discussion paper outlining proposals for advancing reconciliation, including an education campaign and the establishment of a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

February 1991: Robert Tickner appointed as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

May 1991: Minister tables Report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* which inquired into the deaths of 99 Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. The final recommendation supports the concept of a process of reconciliation, with Commissioner Elliott Johnston commenting that 'All political leaders and their parties recognise that reconciliation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Australia must be achieved if community division, discord and injustice to Aboriginal people are to be avoided.'

June 1991: Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act is passed in the House of Representatives with unanimous support.

August 1991: Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act is passed in the Senate with unanimous support.

February 1992: The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation holds its first meeting in Canberra.

June 1992: High Court hands down its *Mabo* decision, recognising special relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the land.

September 1993: First National Indigenous Business Conference in Alice Springs.

1993: International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

September 1993: First national Week of Prayer for Reconciliation with support from all major religious groups.

October 1993: Meeting at Fitzroy Crossing of representatives of the Kimberley Land Council and Aboriginal pastoralists, the Pastoralists and Grainhandlers Association, and the WA Farmers Federation - the first wide ranging meeting in 100 years between these groups.

December 1993: Launch of the *Australians for Reconciliation* network as a means of broadening communication between the Council and the wider community.

December 1993: Native Title Act passed by Federal Parliament recognising native title and providing a process by which native title rights can be established.

March 1994: First meeting of the Joint Council on Aboriginal Land and Mining (J-CALM), representing the first occasion when senior mining company executives and senior Aboriginal leaders have come together to discuss issues of mutual concern.

July 1994: The Uniting Church National Assembly formally apologises for past wrongs and pledges to work in solidarity with the Aboriginal and Islander Congress.

July 1994: Council holds its first cultural awareness training for journalists in the Kimberley region of WA.

November 1994: *Walking Together: The First Steps* is presented to Parliament, documenting the lessons learned during the first term of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

1994: The Australian Football League releases a new code of conduct on racism which receives strong endorsement from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

March 1995: Council presents *Going Forward: Social Justice for the First Australians* to Prime Minister Paul Keating. This major document contains 78 recommendations covering a range of issues including access to land, protection of culture and heritage, and the provision of adequate health, housing and other services.

July 1995: Government amends the Flags Act to give official recognition to the Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag.

February 1996: Aboriginal, pastoral and environmental organisations on Cape York sign the *Cape York Land Use Heads of Agreement*, showing that organisations representing disparate interests can agree on diverse land uses. The agreement is seen as the first step towards a

possible Regional Agreement as defined in the Commonwealth Native Title Act.

May 1996: Council launches the first National Reconciliation Week at a luncheon hosted by Prime Minister John Howard, Opposition Leader Kim Beazley and Democrats Leader Cheryl Kernot.

June 1996: Council announces grant to the Deans of Australian Medical Schools for the development of a cultural awareness training module for medical students.

June 1996: Council convenes Key Stakeholders Meetings on Native Title with representatives from indigenous organisations and from the pastoral, farming, mining and exploration industries, to exchange views on native title issues and discuss possible agreed positions.

May 26-28 1997: Australian Reconciliation Convention, convened by the Council. Attended by 1,800 participants, this event becomes an historic landmark in the reconciliation process and stimulates a grassroots people's movement around the country.

December 1997: Considerable growth in the number of local reconciliation groups and strengthening of the peoples movement for reconciliation in the six months since the convention.

February 1998: Council identifies three major goals for its final term: a Document of Reconciliation; Partnerships to achieve social and economic equality for Indigenous people; and a people's movement to sustain the reconciliation process beyond 2000.

June 3 1999: Launch of Council's Draft Document for Reconciliation.

July-Dec 1999: Public consultations on the draft document.

27 May 2000 At Corroboree 2000 Council ceremonially presents the national reconciliation documents to national leaders and the people of Australia. The following day, more than 250,000 people join the People's Walk for Reconciliation across Sydney Harbour Bridge.

May-December 2000 Hundreds of thousands of Australians join other bridge walks across the country.

December 2000 Council presents its final report, including recommendations, to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament.

1 January 2001 Centenary of Federation and the end of the life of the Council.