

We The People
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We the People 346 The Australian Constitution and Aborigines



Good Day to you. I believe the Australian people will soon be asked to vote in a referendum to amend the Australian Constitution regarding formal recognition of the Aborigine. It appears both sides of the house are in agreement and should this occur it will be a very important moment in time but not necessarily the way you may think. It is not a simple issue and it involves all Australians.

Today we suffer the same fear that many others suffer in the free world and that is if you dare to disagree you will be branded a racist or a homophobe or worse. Hurling PC statements around may build anger in society as it divides the nation because PC results are expected in advance. So I'm bold enough to say if you have a different point of view you may well be roundly castigated if it doesn't fit the political agenda at the time. I have read as much information as I can on this subject and considered the conduct of the aborigine in today's society. I have a somewhat open mind but as with most things the devil is in the detail and **I don't want any change which will elevate one Australian group above the rest** or indeed to help validate so many myths about this subject. If the aborigine is seeking to regain dignity then this is not the best way to do that in my view. Respect has to be earned while dignity lies within one's own psyche and reflects how you feel about yourself but gaining a sense of dignity within a society does depend on others to a degree. Striving for acceptance is noble but dignity does not always follow and the rest of Australia will not give dignity away on command. We all have the right to be treated with dignity if we deserve it and to act with respect is the beginning of the process. Unfortunately today I feel we are being bullied into this thing called reconciliation and reparation and frankly I don't really know what it means. It appears we are to recognise the original occupants of this land before every public speech and yet there was no unified system of ownership in Australia 250 years ago. We look back on the life of Australia and we can readily see things in the light of today which some may now regret but you can't change the past and an excess of regret causes societal gridlock where nothing changes and anger fomented. I really don't like this black arm band view of Australian life in a country that has welcomed so many folk and made such amazing progress in a relatively short time. **When parts of our society are treated differently to others it's wrong but that's a trap we face with altering the Constitution and highlighting one group.** It may well be divisive just as it is to call us non indigenous. I am an indigenous Australian and proud of it as I was born here. We are all Australian's of equal worth and it's not dignified to lessen our worth in this country because one portion of society feels aggrieved. In many ways we have been blessed the English came to this place first and instituted the rule of law and the justice, democracy and freedom we enjoy today. In fact I think we should celebrate this more often and certainly resist any pressure to be ashamed or humbled by it.

The Australian aborigine must make their own way in the 21st century because we all have to and simply seeking change through deploying national guilt is wrong and will lead nowhere. Each year the government allocates well over \$30 billion dollars in the national budget to the aboriginal sector, so money can't be the problem. We all have to go where the jobs are and if we need housing then we take on a mortgage and pay for it. These and many more are the things everyone of us is expected to do and so should the aborigine and especially so for their children and their children to come. **Think through this matter and base your final thoughts on common sense, fairness, equality and fact.**

Until next time this is Kent Bayley

(One view of a Treaty by the Aborigine follows)

One view of a Treaty by the Aborigine which I believe exposes the danger of such an agreement.

Sovereignty. Acknowledge that Aboriginal people have at no time ceded, relinquished or acquiesced any part of their sovereign existence and status. They want a "a space of our own, free from influence of government".

Land rights. Recognition that Aboriginal people have always maintained a property right in land and the natural resources according to their law and customs. They want an acknowledgement that Australia has not been settled. They want freehold, not native title. People who cannot reconnect to their traditional lands need to be included.

Shared power. A sharing of power with non-Aboriginal people through allocated seats.

Representation. A permanent national Aboriginal body.

Guaranteed consideration of interests. Too often governments don't consider Aboriginal interests in their decisions. A treaty could be an "insurance policy" that puts Aboriginal interests at the forefront of Aboriginal policy.

Recognition. Recognition of Aboriginal people as the First Peoples of Australia and the distinct rights that flow from this, such as rights to language and culture. (This is not referring to the governments 'Recognise' campaign which many Aboriginal people reject outright.) But also recognising the past, the need to first acknowledge what has happened to Aboriginal people. For many it's about recognising that Australia was invaded and not colonised.

Reforms. Agreements on the reforms required to reach a more just society and account for Aboriginal dispossession.

Statutory entitlements. This can include reparation, compensation and benefit sharing.