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RE: Uluru Statement – Voice to Parliament

I live on Gumbayngirr country, was a migrant from the US in 1968, and am an Australian citizen. My husband is a New Zealander and an Australian. We have Aussie kids and grandkids, all of whom have had Aboriginal friends over the years.

Where we live, between Coffs Harbour and Grafton, NSW, there is a good awareness of Aboriginal culture and the history of many culturally significant sites. The Arrawarra fish traps at Arrawarra Point are known to all. We know this is a living culture, and we know whose land we are living on. There is an Aboriginal reserve just to the south of our house, but that is a token remainder of what we migrants have taken. Red Rock, so-called for the blood of the indigenous people who were driven over the cliffs, is just to the north of us. This place has a sad history.

I have been on boards and committees of many community groups, and it is always hard to attract Aboriginal representation.

1. Locals are always suspicious of white do-gooders who talk, but don't do.
2. Many Aboriginal people don't use digital communication, other than phones, which is almost a necessity for minutes and meeting paperwork these days.
3. Many feel they will probably be ignored anyway, so what's the point?

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an extremely generous approach from a disenfranchised community of people who seek only a formalised connection with government. They do not want to be the token voice on a committee. They want their opinions to be heard, to be circulated, to be acknowledged, and to be considered seriously.

Nobody is pretending that all First Nations People live in remote outposts in ancient, traditional ways. Australian Christians don't live in the primitive conditions that

Christians did in the time of Christ, yet they expect all people to accept the sanctity of their churches and places of worship in Australia.

Europeans and others have superimposed their (our) traditions right on top of Aboriginal sacred areas, like another layer, burying and hiding what was here before they (we) arrived. I think it's time we paid attention to this exceptional group of people whom we have displaced.

They were here first. Indigenous people are not children for whom we adults are responsible. They are also not prisoners of war who should be punished. They represent a nation-wide culture of many communities; they have served in our armed forces; and they have survived the iniquities of massacres, slavery, stolen children, and the attempts to "breed them out".

The Constitution is the code by which the whole nation is governed and under which we live. It was written by migrants for a new government, but it did not recognise that there was already a society and culture here with its own system of laws.

It has taken a long time for historians to delve into the past and discover how much damage was done, for whatever reason. But now that we know, the Constitution should reflect, permanently, the reality of this country when the Constitution was first envisaged. One-off legislation isn't sufficient.

We have many proud Gumbayngirr people in the region, but we also have many who are fearful and nervous and reluctant to join community groups and activities. If there were an official acknowledgement of their place in the affairs of government, it would give them more encouragement to take part in community affairs.

I can't imagine, if the situation were reversed, that any other people today would have made such a thoughtful, generous offer to their historical oppressors. This won't solve everything, but it would certainly be a wonderful start!

Sincerely,

Patricia McKelvey