

Aboriginal Reconciliation

1997.5. Aboriginal Reconciliation

Submitted 5 October 1997 to the Prime Minister (Mr J. Howard), the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Straights Islander Affairs, Australia (Sen. J. Heron), and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

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1997 – The Year of Aboriginal Reconciliation brought: *the scapegoating campaign, mostly by the One Nation Party; the threat of de-facto extinguishment of native title; funding cuts to the urgently needed social programs; [and] the government's reluctance to fully support the processes of reconciliation.*

We urge leaders of all parties to condemn abuse of the freedom of speech.

Indigenous people qualify for special services and assistance after many years of dispossession and damage by policies and practices such as the removal from traditional land and separation of children from their families. Along with people handicapped by other means the Aboriginals should be the subject of positive discrimination.

We believe the Wik judgement gives a minimal requirement by indigenous Australians to maintain their special connection and relationship with their land and sea. Shared use of land is practice in many ways, e.g. miner's right to prospect on pastoral leases, drover's rights to graze and water cattle, etc. The 10-point plan of amendments to the Wik decision diminishes right to land use for one group of people. This augurs poorly for the process of reconciliation.

Of foremost importance is the recognition and understanding of Aboriginal cultural values. They differ from those of non-indigenous Australians but command respect, e.g. non-acquisitiveness, the sharing of goods, primacy of the extended family, the management of natural resources, etc. The resolution of problems arising from these cultural differences must be based on tolerance, understanding, civility so far lacking in our approach.

- Reconciliation and its principles have widespread support in the community, as shown by surveys and many well-attended public meetings. The opposition stems from vested interests on the land and from racial intolerance.
- Funding must be assured for this process; past injustices and maltreatment acknowledged; [and] a formal apology by the Federal Government should be made on behalf of all of us.
- The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Straights Islanders must be recognised and enshrined in the Australian Constitution in order to protect them by the rule of law.

