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INDIGENOUS ISSUES

The following excerpts are taken directly from the Parliament of Australia Hansard records and have not been altered. In using Hansard, please be aware that the standardised style may have changed over time.



SENATOR NEVILLE BONNER, FIRST SPEECH, 1971

Source: Parliament of Australia

For more than 20,000 years my people have loved this country. They have appreciated its beauty and its capacity to provide for human needs. Throughout that long period my race developed many traditions and one generation has passed on to another a respect for these traditions. Traditions are preserved and honoured in the Australian Parliament also.

Less than 200 years ago the white man came, I say now in all sincerity that my people were shot, poisoned, hanged and broken in spirit until they became refugees in their own land. But that is history and we take care now of the present while, I should hope, we look to the future.

SENATOR LIONEL MURPHY, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

In modern times this section has been regarded, I think rightly, as being offensive to the Aboriginal people and to the people of the Commonwealth generally. It means that some of us Australians are not to be counted as people of the Commonwealth. For our own satisfaction as well as for the sake of our appearance in the eyes of the world, we are glad to see that steps are being taken to enable the people, by referendum, to delete this provision from the Constitution.



SENATOR SAM COHEN, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

I am confident that the voters will declare against any racial discrimination because I believe that basically the people of Australia are against any kind of discrimination on the ground of race, religion, creed or anything else that may distinguish some persons from others.

HAROLD HOLT MP, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

The simple truth is that section 127 is completely out of harmony with our national attitudes and modern thinking. It has no place in our Constitution in this age.

SENATOR VINCE GAIR, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

The Governments of this country have not done themselves any credit in waiting until 1967 to make this correction to enable the people of the Aboriginal race to be taken into account when calculating the population of Australia and to provide that the Commonwealth shall legislate for them in common with the other people of Australia.



GOUGH WHITLAM MP, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

The fact is that with the excision of the words from paragraph (xxvi) of section 51 the members of this Parliament will be able for the first time to do something for Aborigines — Aborigines representing the greatest pockets of poverty and disease in this country. The incidence of leprosy, tuberculosis and infant mortality is higher among Aborigines than among any other discernible section of the world's population and, as we know, the opportunities for Aborigines even to have education - and certainly to pursue a calling after they have left school — to enjoy good housing conditions and to enjoy good public hygiene are less than those of other Australians. Hitherto it has been impossible for the Commonwealth to do these things directly itself. Hereafter it will be possible for the Commonwealth to provide the Aborigines with some of that social capital with which most other Australians are already endowed.



BILL WENTWORTH MP, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

These people need help. They need a secure title to their lands. Here I think the Commonwealth could give a lead. In Arnhem Land we still have tremendous reserves. I was up there recently; I spent five or six weeks going through that country. There is great wealth there potentially. There is sufficient to provide adequate permanent land for the Aboriginal people. I hope that this land will not be alienated from them. Proposals have been advanced which would enable this alienation to take place in perhaps five, six or seven years' time. In my view, such proposals are still out of place. It is still necessary to secure lands for these people in such a way that it cannot be alienated from them or their descendants for at least some time and certainly not until they are more ready than they are today to survive the stresses of our type of economy.



KIM BEAZLEY SR MP, ON THE 1967 REFERENDUM BILL, 1967

Source: Parliament of Australia

On the Yirrkala grievances committee we encountered the idea that the Aboriginals on their reserves were on Crown land and that it was perfectly competent for the Commonwealth Government to alienate to a company the land on which these people lived. Of course, they themselves had a concept of land ownership which related to their creator heroes – to the fact that people were believed to have been conceived by the earth spirit in certain pieces of land and that all these sites were sacred to them. So here was the white man's myth that the King owns all this land in collision with their conception of their own origin. Of course, I have no doubt that in both sets of concepts the ultimate theory is that something is owned by God. The King was King by the grace of God, and these creator heroes in the Aboriginal myths went back to the original creator spirit. That gave them, they thought, some rights to land and, in the evidence that they gave before us, they desired, among other things, the preservation of their sacred sites.



PAUL KEATING MP, ON THE ATSIK AMENDMENT (INDIGENOUS LAND CORPORATION AND LAND FUND) BILL, 1994

Source: Parliament of Australia

Through millennia the Indigenous people of this continent have demonstrated extraordinary strength and resilience and never more so than in the past 200 years. Since European settlement they have survived the alienation of their land, the destruction of their culture, brutality and disease, the heartbreaking severance of family and community bonds. They have survived, but the losses have been immeasurable and proof of the damage remains all too plainly to be seen.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE MP, ON THE NATIVE TITLE BILL, 1993

Source: Parliament of Australia

It is a fundamental liberal principle that people are unlikely to fully contribute to a society in a way that best meets that society's needs unless they feel they have determined their own destinies. Therefore, it has to follow that rights issues are as important as, if not more important than, economic issues.



WILSON TUCKEY MP, ON NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT (WIK), 1997

Source: Parliament of Australia

It is impossible in a court of law to determine somebody's 'dreaming' – somebody living in Melbourne who suddenly goes before a court and who, as the original legislation prescribed, is not necessarily subject to cross-examination. It is impossible for a determination of the court to be made concerning someone who has lived all their life in Melbourne and who says they have some form of association with a billabong in the Kimberleys of Western Australia. Clearly, there is a need and there should be a demonstration. It is a simple requirement and it should not be criticised.

JOHN HEWSON MP, ON THE NATIVE TITLE BILL, 1993

Source: Parliament of Australia

Every time we turn on the TV, we get Mabo for breakfast, Mabo for lunch and Mabo for supper. But we still don't know what Mabo means! We will not be bullied into silence and we will not be intimidated into supporting bad legislation such as this Native Title Bill. Our position has nothing whatever to do with racism. Racism is abhorrent to all of us on this side of the House and, I believe, to all members of this parliament. The record of the coalition parties both in government and opposition bears testimony to our fundamental commitment to the dignity of every individual, to the equality of opportunity that they should have and to their potential to contribute to the common good of society, irrespective of race, religion, gender or belief. We believe these things deeply and passionately, and we will not cop it from the other side.



PAULINE HANSON, ON NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT (WIK), 1997

Source: Parliament of Australia

There is no doubt the long-term goal of the Aboriginal industry is to create a separate Indigenous nation within Australia: a separate country that the allegedly guilty non-Aboriginal Australians will pay for. This is a clear and indisputable fact that will disturb all Australians who believe we are working for the future as one people. The concept and general understanding of 'indigenous' has been created with dubious purpose and dangerous intent. The true and much broader meaning of 'indigenous' is not generally understood, and as it stands it is meant to confuse and deceive.

I am accused of trying to turn back the clock to the 1950s but the government, by refusing to extinguish so-called native title, is turning the clock back to the 1780s. Those who fear fairness and decency applying for everyone call me a racist, but by embracing so-called native title this government and its predecessors are advocating the ownership of land purely based on race.



SENATOR NATASHA STOTT-DESPOJA, ON NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT (WIK), 1997

Source: Parliament of Australia

The Democrats are not just relying on the High Court or constitutional lawyers to tell us what is or what is not racially discriminatory. We actually believe it is the responsibility of politicians that is, of legislators and these two chambers to make moral and value judgments all the time. We should not be in a position to refer the hard judgments to the judiciary. Clearly, in our view, the Howard amendments treat Indigenous rights to land differently from those of other Australians, and we cannot, in all conscience, support that.

Politicians make moral judgments all the time. Our job is not to second-guess legal decisions yet to be made. This government has been clear. These amendments, by the government's own admission, depend on the races power to become law. What a sad indictment on Australia in 1997.



SENATOR JOHN HERRON, ON NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT (WIK), 1997

Source: Parliament of Australia

This government has been accused of being racist. In fact, Mr Noel Pearson has resorted to 'racist scum', 'capitalist swine' and 'apartheid legislation'. At least he is being consistent, because in 1993 during the Mabo debate he abused the Keating government in a similar vein. He said that there was moral scurvy in the Keating government and that the Mabo document was slimy and useless. If Mr Pearson had a logical, reasoned argument, he would use it. Instead, his arguments are so threadbare that he has been forced to resort to hysterical sloganeering. That sloganeering is designed for one purpose only: to create a racial divide. He stands condemned for that.

SENATOR BOB BROWN, ON NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT (WIK), 1997

Source: Parliament of Australia

The right to negotiate has been retained with some aspects of mining at least but, when it comes to the wider issues of the face of the land to which the Aboriginal people so closely relate, the right to negotiate as enormous changes occur across this country in the coming century will be lost if this legislation is to prevail. They cannot negotiate in respect of massive changes involving agriculture, dams, canals, the cutting of native vegetation and mineral exploration camps. In the offshore region, which is so important to them, coastal Indigenous people have no right to negotiate when it comes to the application of fishery developments, mining exploration, jetties, ports and other wholesale changes which are going to impact on the face of the country as they have always known it. We are going to see a continued erosion as a result of this legislation for however long it prevails and a retreat of the rights of the Indigenous people to have a say in the land which is their everything.

SENATOR LINDA BURNEY, FIRST SPEECH, 2013

Source: Parliament of Australia

Ballumb Ambul Ngunawhal Ngambri yindamarra. Ngadu bang marang Ngadhu Ngu-nha winhanga nha nulabang nguwandang. Ngadhu biyap yuganha. Birrang a ngawaal. Ngadhu, yand yaman gid yal. Yindyamarra. Mandaang. Ngarind-ja.

I have just said, in the language of Wiradjuri, my people: 'I pay respect to the ancient Ngunawhal and Ngambri. I say this: good day. I am giving my first speech and I am deeply moved. I have journeyed to another place – a powerful place. I am one person. I wish in this House to honour, to be respectful, to be gentle and to be polite. I am thankful, happy. I could weep.' ...

In 1927 a Wiradjuri man named Jimmy Clements, or Nangar, and his friend John Noble walked for a week over the mountains to Canberra from Brungle Mission – that mission is where my father comes from. They had decided that they wanted to attend the opening of the provisional parliament. When the local police saw their attire they were asked to move on, but the crowd in front of Old Parliament House would not hear of it. They stood up for Nangar and John, and eventually they stayed.



KEN WYATT MP, FIRST SPEECH, 2010

Source: Parliament of Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the agencies of government need to jettison the old mindsets that embody Indigenous Australians as passive recipients of government programs and services, and to instead truly regard people as equals and allow them to be equal partners in developing their solutions. Governments must allow information to be shared so that an informed consent decision-making process is enabled. If change is to occur and become embedded and sustained then all must be equal and active partners in all facets of planning, implementation and accountability, and I would equally apply this to all Australians that we represent.

KEVIN RUDD MP, APOLOGY TO THE STOLEN GENERATIONS, 2008

Source: Parliament of Australia

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.