



## Reconciliation South Australia

### National Reconciliation Week Breakfast

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

#### Keynote Address

**Tanya Hosch, Joint Campaign Director, RECOGNISE**

27 May, 2016

Thanks for inviting me to speak today. I first want to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we're meeting on today, the Kurna people and pay my respects to their elders, current and future leaders and thank you for holding and passing on your culture. We are all better for it.

Not that hard is it? To pay respect. Just to recognise the people whose land you're on or whose home you're in. Just a simple "thanks for having me". Pretty basic courtesy you might say.

Simple recognition - it's such a small, almost effortless thing and yet so potentially transformative in its effects on the both the giver and the receiver. I'll come back to that.

What a truly fantastic start to National Reconciliation Week - here in this room in Adelaide. My sincere congratulations to Reconciliation South Australia - to Co-Chairs Professor Peter Buckskin and Helen Connolly and Board, State Manager Mark Waters and his team.

And I join Helen in acknowledging the distinguished guests in the room.

Yet again, the community of South Australia comes out in force to put their support behind the reconciliation movement.

It makes me proud to be among you.

And with the celebration comes pain and reflection as we remember our nation's history and imagine a better future together.

We have heard from our young people about their vision and aspiration for their futures. Rebekka, Jack, Eboni, Mercelus and Arabella.

They want their voices heard; they want their stories legitimised; they want to be recognised and they want to play their part in fixing the race discrimination that still sits in our nation's rule-book.

I'm proud to share a stage with this next generation of leaders and be among so many young people here this morning. Our future is in very good hands and I applaud them.

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In this room, there is a collective memory and experience of campaigning that spans centuries.

In this room we sit shoulder to shoulder with the people who know what it means to raise their voices and drive change.

49 years ago today, Australia voted YES in our country's most successful referendum.

The 1967 referendum – where more than 90% of Australians voted to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be counted equally. And it gave the Federal Government the power to make laws for us.

In this room this morning are some of the people who stepped up and drove this campaign.

A campaign that stunningly succeeded at a time when race relations were fraught and fractured and civil rights movements around the world were shining a light on the ugliness of racism.

Out of that time came a campaign of hope led by inspirational and trailblazing activists and leaders. And we are honoured to be joined by some of them today, including our dear friends, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue and Shirley Peisley.

These fearless leaders and dear friends stand as a ready reminder - that you fight hard, you dig in and you keep going for the things that matter. You don't give up.

They remind us we are all part of a continuum of history, of struggle and reform; of small steps and big leaps.

The 1967 victory laid the ground-work for so much. It shifted something in the way Australians saw things - saw themselves and each other. A new understanding began. It didn't fix everything, it never intended to. But it was incredibly important.

It propelled so much more and it achieved much more than just the technical changes to the Constitution. It provided a pathway to substantial change, it exceeded the expectations people had of what was possible.

Out of the legacy of organised campaigning of 1967 came the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical services and legal services – important institutions backed by federal funding - because the 1967 campaigners won that mandate.

And 1967 forged the path for self-determination movements and became the powerful antecedent to land rights.

Once you understand that, you understand that without that win, without those campaigners and their months and years of tireless, thankless work, none of the rest of that journey might have been possible.

So today's audience spans the generations of these long, drawn-out struggles for basic rights and freedoms:

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- for reforms and legislation to give back land,
- for political activism and government action to tackle entrenched disadvantage in our communities
- and for fundamental recognition of who we are.

The struggle continues. It will always continue until there is no more progress to be made, until nothing remains that's unfair or discriminatory or ignorant or racially loaded.

In other words, it continues from these honoured earlier generations through us in the present day and will continue for generations to come.

Now, as we've been the beneficiaries of their hard work and sacrifices, of their success in 67 and the big steps and victories that followed, it's incumbent upon us to make some gains of our own; to leave the place to our kids, improved on what we found.

All of us in this room today have the chance to continue that legacy and be part of that big sweep of history.

- To do what the 67 campaigners did and gift to successive generations real change and reform.
- To take a step back and consider the campaign for constitutional recognition and understand it as our responsibility to make this change exceed all expectations.
- To consider the gift we give to all Australians by dealing with the blight of racial discrimination in our nation's basic law.

The 1967 generation has shown us the way. We are the generation of Australians responsible for making this moment happen. We cannot leave it to my young daughter, your children or grandchildren.

And now it's our time to dig in and work hard.

It's up to us.

This is not a new conversation. We have been on this journey for constitutional recognition for nearly four years and the calls for this important reform go back for decades - long before any politician placed it in their election manifesto.

But like any campaign for a change that matters, the longer it goes on the harder it gets.

The harder it gets, the more determined you have to become.

So I say to you today, now is the time for supporters to step up, saddle up and get ready for a tough, hard ride.

Because, real change, real reform is never secured without a fight.

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And a change of this magnitude –

- where the foundations of our basic law will be rebuilt
- where we deal with the discrimination in the nation's highest legal code
- which can only be done by the people - not by politicians, or judges or anyone else
- where all voting aged Australians take part in acknowledging we have ALWAYS been here and that we have to remove racism from all parts of our community, structures, laws and systems, no matter how long it takes.

A change like this will only come after an almighty struggle.

So the easier, breezier, days of this campaign are behind us.

But there's no point being part of this during the sunny days, the fair weather.

Because it's only in the middle of a terrible tempest that this thing will be won.

So I say to all of you, who have been such wonderful supporters, stick with us.

Stay the course.

Because if, after a decade we give up on this now, when it's got hard and when there are doubts and when there are detractors - then what do we do next time there is an injustice to be fixed on this scale?

Does anyone in this room believe the changes in 1967 came easily? I know there's some people here who could set you straight about that.

Does anyone in this room believe the fight for land rights, for native title for the apology to the stolen generations came easily?

There's plenty of you here that know how tough that was. You had your detractors, who said it wasn't good enough.

So what right have I got, have any of us got, to give in because some people are saying this is not good enough.

All these changes - some symbolic, some practical, many of them both - only came about because people were determined, patient, stubborn and did not give up when the going got tough.

So like all those before us, who toughed it out, I urge you to – stick with it and stay the course.

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Of course I would like to be standing before you today and saying the model's agreed and ready and the referendum is imminent and everything is perfect.

But as we know, it's not that simple.

That's not to let politicians off the hook – they also need to saddle up and get this done.

They can't let this drift, and they can't hide behind the notion that they will only expend their political capital when all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples agree. I'm sorry but we won't all agree.

I'm confident that a large and impressive majority of us can agree.

The truth is this is really hard work and we are in the toughest period of this campaign and it will get tougher.

But if we can be tough, then I predict when we look back at this time we will see it as an era where we significantly moved the dial on political aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

And this is not ignoring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still the most disadvantaged people in this country – to this nation's very great shame.

We find ourselves in a time where the rights and recognition struggle, that goes back decades and decades, has been reignited.

I'm talking about treaty, about agreement making more generally **and** about recognition and dealing with racial discrimination in the Constitution.

So while there is disagreement amongst us on some issues, and about the best ways to achieve our political aspirations, the truth is, we are making progress.

And as long as we disagree respectfully that's ok.

The loudest voices are often from the radical ends of debate – from those who come from the long tradition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resistance.

Those who have always urged a high degree of accountability from the people working within the system to drive change.

I acknowledge that many of our people who have offered and continue to offer resistance do so at a high personal cost.

In truth, it's important to be pushed by people from this tradition to strive for the best outcome. These voices matter and contribute to the vision.

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So to bring this back to the debate about constitutional recognition – the 10 or 15% of people who want to see a different agenda, deserve to and must be heard with respect.

In return, the 85 - 90% who want to move forward with constitutional reform, at this time, also deserve to be heard with respect.

I also believe we need to stick to the facts as we get to this critical point in the debate.

I have been part of the campaign for treaty over time. I was one of the privileged few, as a young person, to learn from our more experienced leaders and thinkers as a youth representative on ATSIC's treaty think tank.

For me and so many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples who support treaty and constitutional recognition, we know that this is not an either/or choice.

I strongly reject the false choice that is promoted by some when it comes to constitutional recognition and treaty.

We should not be asked to choose.

If you leave with just one thing today – that is really important to understand.

Treaty and constitutional recognition can co-exist. We can work for both. Repeated legal advice makes that clear.

I spend a lot of time talking in the media and in other places defending the idea that constitutional recognition is no threat to other political aspirations for our people.

This is a good problem to have. It means there's a platform and a place and a growing process for these conversations.

Here are three great examples:

As we gather here, 700 kms to our east in Melbourne the latest in a series of meetings about what a Victorian treaty process might look like is underway.

How fantastic is that? I wish the Victorian treaty advocates and the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews all the very best in those important ongoing conversations.

If we'd had our referendum last week and achieved recognition would it have prevented that? Of course not.

As we gather here today, 2700 kms to our west in Perth the architects of the Noongar Settlement (effectively a treaty) continue to roll-out its historic suite of compensation, land and title rights.

If we'd had our referendum last week and achieved recognition would it have prevented that? Of course not.

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As we gather today, here in South Australia the Ngarrindjeri regional partnerships agreements are driving economic benefits for the Ngarrindjeri people.

If we'd had our referendum last week and achieved recognition would it have prevented that? Of course not.

Brilliant, lasting, meaningful work – happening now.

It's becoming a cliché but we can walk and chew gum. Or as my friend, the brilliant young Aboriginal barrister Tim Goodwin says we can even walk and chew gum and text on our mobiles all at the same time.

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We have to fight for this change now.

Australia's Constitution is, rightly, incredibly difficult to alter. To change it you need an overall majority of votes nationwide, plus majorities in a majority of states.

Only 8 out of 44 referendums have ever succeeded and it hasn't been changed for 39 years.

It means any change needs overwhelming support pretty much across the continent. So that's our challenge and that's why we need to keep up the work and really dig in.

We're very confident we can get there because all the signs are strong. Consistently.

The Referendum Council is diligently doing its work, and will take the conversation about the model to communities across the country.

We know the Australian public is impatient to get this done.

For four years we have conducted rigorous and large scale polling of attitudes across the community, making this the only large scale, randomly selected opinion research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this issue.

It is designed to be representative of the broadest range of people in the community.

And that research has consistently shown high levels of support for the recognition of the First Australians in the Constitution.

This morning I would like to announce, for the first time, the latest findings from our eighth consecutive poll.

Conducted throughout March, the Polity tracking study showed:

- Strong support with 77% of non-Indigenous and 87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples saying they would vote Yes for recognition in the Constitution;

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- Strong agreement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and leaders are driving the push for recognition. There was with a clear majority of non-Indigenous and nearly two thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents in agreement with this.
- The survey also found that almost two thirds of Indigenous respondents would be likely to get involved and support the Recognise campaign. A clear sign that there are many supporters of recognition and Recognise.

Meanwhile the RECOGNISE campaign has taken a leaf out of the 67 campaign play-book and taken this issue to the streets, homes, communities across Australia.

Our three year old Journey to Recognition has travelled over 35,000 kilometres – holding 344 events across 260 communities, and meeting with over 26,000 people in the process.

More than 293,000 people have signed on as supporters of RECOGNISE.

During our Journey conversations we talk about the silence of our 50,000 year history in our Constitution and the racial discrimination that sits in it.

Many people are hardly aware of these issues. Some are hardly aware we have a Constitution.

But once they understand it, and what's at issue, overwhelmingly they are supportive. They see the simple justice in what's being proposed. It's a hugely encouraging reaction.

The case for change is powerful and it's achievable. We can do it.

And finally, just like 67, consider the alternative. If we can't achieve this important goal, our great grandkids will be living in a country 100 years from now that still hasn't recognised Indigenous Australia.

And they will live with the stain of racism on our nation's rule-book.

There are always reasons to wait for something that seems more perfect or more complete.

We can always find excuses to not do things – to put things off.

But are we really going to look our kids in the eye and say sorry – we had the chance to deal with this but we thought we should wait for something better, something else.

It's not acceptable.

We need to get this done and in just over 12 months this could be done.

The same pre-conditions are in place as back in 67. We have a fantastic, extremely committed team of campaigners. We have multi-party political support.

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And, let's be honest. Even though this is big step forward when you think about it -we're not asking much.

We're asking that Australia takes up its place in modern society as a country that doesn't have racially discriminatory sections lurking in its nation's basic law.

We're asking that the national founding document recognises the people who were here all along.

We're here, and we've always been here.

And what I'm simply asking of you today is to see yourself in the continuum of history – connect yourself to the 67 campaigners - let's seize the opportunity and get this done.

Thank you.

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