

## Bring our people in from cold

TANYA HOSCH THE AUSTRALIAN AUGUST 05, 2014 12:00AM

**TWELVE months ago, as he welcomed to Garma a relay of Australians campaigning for constitutional recognition for First Australians, Djunga Djunga Yunupingu — a senior Gumatj man said: “It is the right time, and the right thing to do. Don’t wait five or ten years, otherwise some of us will be old or gone.”**

Since then, as recognition campaigners travelled the country, we have heard many people urge the nation on to this referendum.

In Melbourne, Melton schoolteacher, Sharon Sowter, a proud Yorta Yorta woman, spoke of the legacy of her great-great-great grandfather and legendary Victorian Aboriginal leader, William Cooper. “It’s about putting right what’s been wrong for too long and it’s just what has to happen. It’s not whether it will happen. It’s essential,” she said.

On the Dukes Highway in regional South Australia, Emma Hay from the Burrendies Aboriginal Corporation and her young daughter pulled over on the side of the road to tell us: “We support recognition. It’s important for our identity. It’s important to make us feel good, to be proud of who we are and where we come from, and our culture and our people.”

In the red centre, Sonia Waters took her two daughters on the relay to see the growing movement of Australians who, like them, are proud of their Aboriginal heritage. “Our nation’s Constitution will be inherited by our children and future generations,” she said. “So let’s fix it now, and not leave this work to them.”

In Raukkan, South Australia, Ngarrindjeri elder Clyde Rigney said recognition would help heal the wounds. “I think it’s been a glaring omission that we need to look at,” he said. “And we need to appreciate where we do all come from and we need to mature about what we think of as our true history, I think that could be helpful to us all.”

In the Kimberley, Coolibah Quilty, a stolen generations man who grew up at Springvale Station outside of Halls Creek, told us that before the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people in the region had been treated very badly. He thought this next referendum would be another step forward for fairness and it would be important for the next generation to see the country’s first people and cultures recognised in the Constitution.

In Fremantle, young Noongar woman Tiana Culbong asked the city to stand with her in support: “It is now 2014. A time for change; a time to move forward as a nation united; a time to remove a constitutional silence; a time to recognise Aboriginal people and our history in this country.”

In Busselton, Josh Whiteland spoke with pride of his Wardandi Bibbulman ancestors, who have walked the South West Cape region and beyond for over 50,000 years. “Our bloodlines are connected to the oldest continuing cultures on the planet,” he said. “This remarkable and impressive story should be recognised in our founding document. It’s about acknowledging the truth. Someone was and still is here.”

At Atherton in Far Northern Queensland, Yidinji elder Uncle Ron Turpin said he hoped the journey would open “the hearts of all Australians to support this important cause for change for a

brighter future.”

Many non-indigenous Australians also joined in. Sam Robinson, a woman from Cundletown, NSW ran the Australian Outback Marathon at Uluru to raise awareness for Recognise, and a team of cyclists — black and white — rode 1200 kilometres for recognition through the Northern Territory.

In Pannawonica in the Pilbara, two-thirds of the town including Traditional Owners, Rio Tinto miners and the entire Pannawonica Primary School took a photo last month to declare that Pannawonica Recognises.

Expectations have been raised, and no-one wants to see goodwill squandered. There is a great deal of work to do but a great many people to help us do it.

Last weekend at Garma, the Yolngu called for us to pursue this referendum boldly and with confidence. I hope the nation’s leaders left Gulkula with the words, penned by Galarrwuy Yunupingu in 2008, in their hearts: “I wanted constitutional recognition to bring my people in from the cold, to bring us into the nation.”

Tanya Hosch is joint campaign director for Recognise, the movement to recognise the First Australians in our Constitution.

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