

Transcript

Title: Engaging with Reconciliation and Truth-Telling

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ANDREW GUNSTONE: Good afternoon, everyone. I respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the lands on which Swinburne campuses are located, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and future. I also pay my respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here today and acknowledge the continuing and unceded sovereignties of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

I particularly want to acknowledge Aunty Jackie Huggins AM, who is the Vice Chancellor's Fellow for Indigenous Leadership at Swinburne. I'd like to thank Jackie for her wonderful contribution to the university, and I'm delighted she can attend today. My name's Andrew Gunstone. I'm Executive Director of Reconciliation Strategy and Leadership at Swinburne and Professor of Indigenous Studies. I'd like to hand over to Ian to introduce yourself. Ian.

IAN HAMM: Thank you, Andrew. Hello, everyone, my name's Ian Hamm-- I'm a Yorta Yorta man-- I'm also the Chair of the Indigenous Governance Committee for Swinburne University-- among other things I do-- and it's a pleasure to be here today.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Thanks, Ian. I'm wondering-- what we'll do in this seminar is, we'll have a discussion on truth-telling and then a discussion on reconciliation, and then bring them together to discuss our new National Centre that will be being established towards the end of the year. So Ian, I saw great article you wrote in the papers a week or so ago on truth-telling, and I was wondering if you wanted to have a chat about your thoughts on truth-telling.

IAN HAMM: Yeah happy to, Andrew. Look-- truth-telling, I think, is a relatively new concept for Australia. Certainly, we've seen it in other parts of the world-- New Zealand, the United States and Canada in particular-- and obviously the one which a lot of people refer to is the Truth-Telling Commission that occurred in South Africa after the end of the apartheid era. But I think there's some really big challenges for truth-telling in the Australian context.

I think a lot of-- while we talk about truth-telling and Truth Telling Commissions-- what does that really mean? What do we find when we scratch underneath it? So I think there's some work to be done, Andrew, in what our understanding of truth-telling is about, what can be achieved by it, what it should focus on, and most importantly-- very simply, what's it for? I don't think that question's asked enough-- simply, what's it for? And what good will it do us?

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Thanks, Ian. And yeah, I think most people who are attending today in Victoria would be aware of this, but Victoria has created the very first Truth Telling Commission in Australia, called the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. And Yoo-rrook means truth in the Wemba Wemba/Wamba Wamba language. It's the first truth-telling body to be established in Victoria. There's five commissioners that have just been appointed Eleanor Bourke, Wayne Atkinson, Sue-Anne Hunter, Maggie Walter, and Kevin Bell. And its key functions is to establish the official record of the impact of colonisation in Victoria, and using Indigenous Peoples' stories. And to make detailed recommendations about practical actions and reforms needed in Victoria, and the next step is that they're currently setting up processes that will guide the work.

So Ian, what are your thoughts on the specific truth-telling process in Victoria, and how do you think that can work? And is this a model that can be used elsewhere in Australia?

IAN HAMM: Yeah look I think actually the Victorian experiment or the Victorian pilot commission in Australia is such a great opportunity to give direction for future Truth-Telling Commissions around Australia-- which quite frankly, I think they should be picked up by all jurisdictions-- but it's also an opportunity for us to determine where do we want them to go, what do we want them to do?

I guess in my view, the role of a Truth-Telling Commission shouldn't be limited to telling government what it needs to do. I used to do that myself-- I was a senior public servant for 20 years and in the public service for over 30. I think the opportunity though, is for really the Truth-Telling Commission to be able to fill in as its first priority-- is to fill in the narrative-- what is the Aboriginal story in the story of Victoria in this case?

So if you like-- if Victoria is a book then it's got a whole chapter that's just missing, or a whole chapter that's got sporadic anecdotes spread across blank pages. This is an opportunity to fill in that chapter with the full story of the experience of Aboriginal Victoria, which is a really important thing to do.

I think the other part is that following up from this is to give all Victorians an exposure to what has been the reality for their fellow Victorians who happen to be Aboriginal. I think that that's not well understood and I think that that's a critical thing for this commission to focus on-- is the ability to tell the story of Aboriginal Victoria from the view of Aboriginal Victorians for the wider Aboriginal community to hear and understand.

I don't think apportionment of blame or seeking justice as it were-- in a retributive sense-- that's certainly not part of their terms of reference and certainly not a productive thing anyway. But for me, it's really about understanding where we have been, where we are now, and importantly, that serving is a platform for where we go in the future.

That, I think is the real potential of this Truth Telling Commission-- is to establish the platform of how Victoria moves forward in its relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians from here. And not just simply government. If it's simply government then it won't achieve much, and it won't be outside the usual way business is done anyway. Because the relationship between Aboriginal Victorians and the government has been there for 150-plus years. If it is only about that,

then it's no different than the past. No, this has to be about the commission and what it does in its role in supporting the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victoria.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: No, thanks Ian. I think we've seen some examples. You mentioned South Africa. There's other examples-- the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well. And I think we've all seen the horrible, horrific news on the weekend about what they found at one of the old residential schools. So there's been a number of these truth and reconciliation commissions across the world in South America and Africa as well.

And I suppose we've had sort of similar-- interested to hear your views on this-- we've had similar commission in the past. I'm thinking of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991. That was a Truth-Telling Commission in the sense that it was looking at all the factors engaged in overrepresentation and deaths in custody and so looked at the whole gamut of society. And then of course the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Bringing them Home report in 1997, which detailed the horrific stealing of children over several generations. So we've had similar sort of approaches before, but what makes you think-- what do you think is different about this approach from the previous ones?

IAN HAMM: Look, I think the biggest single approach is it's being led by Aboriginal people. That is the single biggest approach is that those days other inquiries, as worthy as they were, and the great outcomes that the reports provided even if they weren't entirely taken up by government, were led by non-Aboriginal people seeing it through the lens saying it through the lens of non-Aboriginal people the commissioners or the inquiry leads and that is that's not a slight against them at all in any way. It's just that this time around, you've got Aboriginal people leading the process. The chair of it is an Aboriginal woman. Three of the five commissioners are Aboriginal-- or four of the five commissioners rather, are Aboriginal. I think that is a landmark moment in how the narratives and the issues for Aboriginal people will be categorised.

One of the things that inquiries in the past-- they've always focused on deficits, or on things that are chronically wrong, or society can no longer run from. So the Deaths in Custody Royal Commission was quite clearly, something had gone so wrong, so bad that it had to be looked into. And that was the amount of Aboriginal people dying in custody, which unearthed the amount of people in incarceration, which unearthed the chronic failure of a whole bunch of systems.

Then the Bringing them Home inquiry was, everybody knew the story. Everybody knew the unpleasant truth, but nobody had wanted to confront it, and then the government of the day did. Sir Ronald Wilson-- or rather not the government of the day, the previous government, the Keating government, Paul Keating-- he was the one who went to Redfern and said we killed it. We stole the lands, we stole the children.

People can say whatever they like about Paul Keating-- he's one of the bravest men when it comes to confronting one of the biggest social issues this country has ever faced. He established that inquiry, and while he was no longer Prime Minister when it was delivered, we should thank him for doing it. Because he said I've heard the stories, I don't need any other evidence, let's find out what's there. But again, it was looking at what was wrong.

I think one of the things with this Truth Telling Commission and it being through Aboriginal eyes-- it will also talk about what's good about being Aboriginal-- what's positive about being Aboriginal. Because that is part of their truth. How come, if everything in our life has been so bad, then how come we're still here? What is it about us that just makes it so we don't go away? We have good things to talk about, too, about ourselves. We have positiveness in our lives which has got us through the bad times. And in fact, again, that platform for where we go forward from here?

As I put it often when I speak, what's good about being a Blackfella? We have to talk about that. We have to say that. We have to acknowledge that not only for ourselves as an Aboriginal community, but also perhaps for-- to be honest, non-Aboriginal people to say, maybe we should act a bit more like the Aboriginal community in some senses, and some of the broader social issues that affect all Australians might then be dealt with more adequately.

So that, I think, is the biggest difference. Having it Aboriginal-led and expanding the scope of what the commission looks like to not only be what's bad and what's wrong, but what's good and what's strong. And how that can be used as a base for going forward.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Ian, I think that's absolutely critical. I know you and I've had a number of discussions about how important it is to have a strength-based discourse rather than a deficit-based discourse and a whole range of these areas, so I think that's absolutely critical. And of course that's really important for everyone to acknowledge that we wouldn't have had a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, we wouldn't have had a National Inquiry without the generations of Indigenous activists lobbying governments and holding governments up to account. So I think that's absolutely critical.

From the perspective of the wider community, the non-Indigenous community that is engaging in reconciliation, where do you see members of the community playing a role in truth-telling? Because a lot of this is going to be done over a fairly broad structural level. What role can people in the community engage in, in terms of truth-telling, do you think?

IAN HAMM: I think the biggest thing that most people can do in terms of truth-telling is to listen-- is to not judge, but to hear-- to not respond, but to contemplate what they hear. I think too often Australians can be awfully defensive about that which makes them uncomfortable. There will be a lot of uncomfortable things come out of this truth-telling. And if I was to say to the wider community, what should they do in relation to it-- is to listen. To hear, to contemplate, to understand and absorb it, and think about it. That's the biggest thing most people can do to start with. Then as a result of that, think about their relationship with and their interaction with Indigenous people. What are the terms on which we should do that?

Now what are the standards or protocols-- for want of a better word-- or just the social norms that we engage with Aboriginal people on, now we are better informed and understand their story and most importantly, how they feel. I think too often that gets overlooked. How other people feel? That for me, is probably the biggest thing most ordinary people can do. And then they think about-- what they should think about-- in the ability-- in the bits and pieces where my world is, the bits that I can affect, what can I do to build a better relationship?

What can I do so that history, in my little pocket of the world, doesn't repeat itself? That can happen in any small town throughout Australia or in any suburb, in any of the big cities, in any of the most remotest places, that's what can happen. So I think if people were to ask me, what can ordinary people do out there in the community? That's what I think they can do. And when you have everybody doing this, that's when you get a societal change.

That's when you get a movement of a community. And I say it in the broader sense-- becoming a better community, a more tolerant community, a more understanding community. Make no mistake, this will be hard. This will be difficult. This will be a challenge. This will require compromise from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.

And that's not going to be easy, because great challenges like this never are. And there are a lot of entrenched feelings on both sides, but this is a start and it will require us to act with-- everyone to act with a level of maturity, which is not about being defensive and hanging onto the past, but saying we acknowledge the past-- we own it. The important part is, where do we go from here and how can we make things a better place?

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Yeah. I just want to apologise to everyone. A house across the road is getting built, so if we hear a lot of truck noises, hopefully that doesn't come through.

But look, yeah, I totally agree, again Ian. And I think, from my point of view, I'm a Whitefella who's been working in this space, have been honoured to work in this space for 25 years-- I learn things every day. And I think non-Indigenous people need to have that humility. I think Stephen Hawking once said the most dangerous people are those people with a little bit of knowledge. And I think, extending on from what you're saying, I think non-Indigenous people really, we need to make sure we recognise that we're going to continue to learn and to recognise White privilege and to work against White fragility. Because I think those concepts can often hold things back-- is when people have their own views challenged. It can be then difficult to then engage in a genuine process of truth-telling. I think that's absolutely critical.

I want to move on to the broader notion of reconciliation. And certainly Swinburne has engaged with reconciliation in a very broad sense. Many people see reconciliation as a process of improving relationships. And that's really important-- improving relationships is really critical. But certainly through our work in reconciliation at Swinburne, and also in our National Centre-- which will get on to in a little bit-- we see reconciliation in a very broad range of ways. To look at Indigenous rights such as self-determination. To look at cultural safety, to look at Indigenous knowledges, to address history in truth-telling. There's a whole broad range of areas that I think a broad reconciliation process needs to engage with. So I was wondering what your views are on reconciliation Ian, and how we sort of engage in this process.

IAN HAMM: Yeah look, I think reconciliation, because it has come over such a journey-- it's at least 20 years old if not longer-- and I kind of anchor it in the Mabo case. I anchor it in the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody, so it's like over 30 years old, really. But it started to get legs around the year 2000-- the establishment of Reconciliation Australia and so forth.

I think when we look at the reconciliation journey, it's a lot more complex than I think a lot of people had thought it would be. But then when you look back on it well, of course, we're trying to rebuild the relationship between two distinct groups of people. That's not done overnight nor is it done simplistically. And I think that that's been one of the challenges which people have now accepted, is that this wasn't a one-off series of things and then everything would be just hunky-dory. This is going to be an evolving, changing relationship over time. It's like any reconciliation where two groups just simply do not understand each other. It takes a long time to do it. It's not almost-- it is intergenerational.

I think with the reconciliation agenda from where we have come from, we have made some progress. We should not deny that. We have made progress. We are in a better place now than where we were a decade ago or a generation ago. But having said that, has reconciliation as a notion become quite prescriptive-- or people automatically going to a prescribed framework and thinking that that is reconciliation? And by that I mean, the obvious one is a reconciliation action plans and their framework.

Now, the reconciliation action plans and the framework was really meant to be a tool to support reconciliation, which in the context of the Australian example was really about, how do we transform people? How do we move people? How do we transform them into a better understanding of their opposite numbers, be that Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal Australians?

Obviously, a lot of the focus on non-Aboriginal Australia, but equally transformation of Aboriginal people too, so that we understand we have a better place in Australian society as well. I think that that got lost a bit. That really, Reconciliation Action Plans and the focus on organisations with Reconciliation Action Plans-- that was not the outcome. The outcome was to transform people. So that whether they are in those organisations or not, they had a better understanding and relationship with the Aboriginal community.

So that the plans and the organisations were simply a tool for that purpose, they weren't the outcome in their own right. I think what's happened though, over time, is the focus has so been on Reconciliation Action Plans and the targets, and the activities, and the outputs in those plans, that people think that that is the end, and it's not at all. They are simply meant to be mechanisms or tools that get you to a better place as a group of people, that goes beyond your working life or your organisation is, or your community group is or your social service group, whatever it might be.

The prime example which can best illustrate where the purpose of them got lost entirely-- I can sum up in two words-- Rio Tinto. Elevate RAP said it was doing lots of wonderful things-- and make no mistake, Rio had done good things in the past, but they lost their way. They focused on their Aboriginal interaction as a group of stakeholders. They saw their elevate plan as a series of actions to be ticked off. And when really, the transformation process was put to a test-- that is, would they respect the importance in the attachment of traditional owners to a place. They failed it miserably. Hence it showed the fallibility of the reconciliation process we have if we look to the process as being the outcome, and not simply being what it is-- that is a process to a wider outcome.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Absolutely, and I've got another example I've thought about over the years is with Corroboree 2000, where we had 250,000 people march across Sydney Harbour Bridge and over

a million people across the country. And they were amazing outcomes. But I think the general Australian population almost did that yep, we ticked off reconciliation now, and then it sort of lapsed for a number of years. And I think-- there was the-- the public attention then turned to refugees and asylum seekers and not as much on Indigenous issues anymore. I think that's because the general population thought it was ticked off. And I think you're absolutely right.

The Corroboree 2000 was fantastic. RAPs can be really, really useful. But if we lose sight of the overall picture of what we're doing-- so an organisation that's got a RAP can't just get the RAP done and then go back to it in a couple of years to see how they're going. It's got to be-- the RAPs have to be a tool to embed reconciliation in the organisational culture and to give individuals in that organisation a way to engage on a personal level. So I think that's really important, to look at how we engage in a more deeper level with reconciliation.

Moving to the National Centre-- and just to let everyone know, we're really keen to engage and have some questions asked, so we'll probably open up for questions in a few minutes' time. So just put your questions in the Q&A box in Function. With the National Centre, as you know Ian, Swinburne's been working in reconciliation now for a number of years and we worked with the Korin Gamadji Institute at Richmond Football Club and Reconciliation Australia to set up the inaugural National RAP Conference and we've been doing a range of stuff at that national level.

And when we came to writing up our latest RAP-- and an Elevate organisation has to have a national leadership piece, and we thought long and hard about what our national leadership piece is, and we're delighted that we have a national leadership piece that's creating the National Centre for Reconciliation Practise that'll come up by the end of the year.

And this Centre will be looking at ways to help increase national understandings of reconciliation. Not just in academia-- we're not going to be an ivory tower institute-- but looking at working with community and working with industry to look at how do we help increase reconciliation understandings across the full breadth of what reconciliation means. So I was wondering if you could share your thoughts on what you see as what we can gain from having that National Centre and how that can engage in broader national approaches.

IAN HAMM: Look, I think that the opportunity for the Centre is enormous-- not only what the Centre can do, but also what it can contribute. One of the things is really, there have never been really a broad range to look-at, so how have we travelled with reconciliation in this country? And the Reconciliation Australia has been limited in its capacity to really have an in-depth look at, where are we now? How have we travelled? Are we on the right path? What else do we need to do? Other things we need to change, and then things we need to stop doing.

So I think the Centre provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of how we have gone with reconciliation in its broadest sense, where we are in its broadest sense, and help us re-examine and work out where do we want to get to. So not only where we've been, where we are, but more importantly-- where do we want to get to? What does that look like? And help us unpack and really analyse the lessons of the past 20 years and how we might apply them to the future. That hasn't been done. Nobody's really contemplated that until now.

And Swinburne with this Centre, I think, has the opportunity to set a lead for that. The challenge in the establishment of this Centre will be ensuring that it does keep focused on the bigger picture, that it thinks of things as-- excuse me-- as tools for trying to get to that bigger end as opposed to tools being an end as themselves.

So as I said, like reconciliation action plans-- I still think they're a useful tool, but do we need more and different tools? And how can we use those tools to get to that bigger end? And so I think there's a real opportunity here for the Centre to broaden the discussion, to take it to the next level. Because things haven't stagnated. The world has moved on. We have a whole generation of Aboriginal people now-- particularly younger ones-- wanting to take their place in the economy, for example. And that's not merely going from being unemployed to a job. No, they want participation in the economy over a lifetime of economic engagement. That's something we have to contemplate when we think about reconciliation. What does it mean for us? That is distinctly different from a generation ago. So the brief of the Centre is going to be much broader and much wider than even I think now, when people talk about it, what they're thinking about.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: I agree. I'm really looking forward to looking at these big picture areas, and you know we've got a treaty process going on in Victoria, Queensland under the leadership of Jackie Huggins and Northern Territory under the leadership of Michael Dodson are looking at treaty processes as well. We've got the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which Swinburne has strongly supported. We've got the Truth Telling Commissions, we've got a number of big areas happening at the moment. We've also got the deeper issues of sovereignty, and sovereignty is an issue that is-- sovereignty's never been ceded, and sovereignty is an issue that continues to be an area that we need to look at. So I think having a look at those bigger pictures for Australia and how we look at those engagements is equally as important as looking back, as you say, to how we've gone with reconciliation, and to look back in the last 20-odd years-- it is the 20th anniversary of Reconciliation Australia this year and it's 30 years since the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was created. So there's some really timely issues to look at that as well.

IAN HAMM: Yeah. I think Andrew, actually, a couple of things you mentioned-- I think part of the role of the Centre is going to be unpacking what we mean by certain things. So for example, when we say reconciliation, how many Australians broadly understand what that means? I think the Centre's going to have an educative function around some of the things which people talk about-- sovereignty, for example. If I went and applied the dreaded pub test-- which I hate, by the way-- because I hate public policy being formulated on what people perceive-- the punters in the front bar might be thinking in between the race four and race five out of Sandown or something-- that's the pub test. We shouldn't use that. But if I asked them what sovereignty is, they'll probably say, isn't that the favourite in race six? You know? How much of them actually understand that? We have to talk about that. We have to-- I think that's going to be a role for this Centre-- is to revisit some of the assumptions which people who are so heavily into reconciliation-- so heavily into the tackling of Aboriginal issues-- when we talk, we all get it. The average punter doesn't. And if this is to be a movement of Australians, Black and White, I think we need to talk about what we actually mean by some of this stuff. That's going to be a really important role for this Centre-- to bring everyone up to speed so we know what we're talking about, and I don't think that's been done enough.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Absolutely, and also the other sort of key area that we're looking at with this Centre is looking at international experiences. Because so much to us as a country, we look very much inwardly at ourselves, so there's been guaranteed Maori representation in the New Zealand Parliament for well over 100 years. In this country we still do not have reserved seats in Parliament, we've only just recently had Indigenous people being elected into parliament.

The political parties by and large have not engaged in this process at all. So how do we say what these lessons New Zealand can have, for example with that. I mean New Zealand has also had the Treaty of Waitangi for one and a half centuries, and we've had treaties in North America as well. So Australia remains the only former British colony not to have a treaty for ourselves. So it's really good to see what other truth and reconciliation commissions, - the whole range of other things—the Sámi Parliament. There's a whole range of really interesting international examples that I think can help us look at what we can do in Australia as well.

IAN HAMM: I think one of the things too, actually, we need to look at, Andrew-- and looking at those examples that are going on in other places around the world, is look at what the opportunity of truth-telling, of reconciliation, of a National Reconciliation Centre, look at what Aboriginal people bring to-- it shouldn't be about what-- just about what Aboriginal Australians are perceived to get. It should be about what do Aboriginal people actually give? What do we give to our society? What can we contribute to our society to be a better one? Too often, people don't think of that.

So, seats in Parliament is a classic example. If you have reserved seats, does that automatically assume that those parliamentarians will just focus on that constituency issue? Whereas in fact, by having Aboriginal people in the parliament per se-- not in Aboriginal designated seats-- what did they contribute beyond just Aboriginal issues? Well, they contribute a hell of a lot across the public life of Australia beyond Aboriginal issues.

If you have a look at-- in sport-- sport is a thing where Aboriginal people have played, and what have Aboriginal people contributed? It's not been about showing oh look, Aboriginal people are really good at sport. In a lot of instances, Aboriginal people's participation has elevated the whole sport. It's made it a better sport played at a different pace, a different level. AFL football for me is probably the stand out. Because of Aboriginal influence over that game, it is actually evolved and changed, particularly the last 30 years. It's really taken off, you know?

When you look at how the Krakouers played the game-- Michael Long played the game-- it's made a difference. If you have Aboriginal administration in sport, boy does it make a difference. I can tell you that, because I used to be one. I used to be a president of a football league. There's something people never thought about. Not a Blackfella who was playing football, a Blackfella who was running football.

So I brought my whole view of applying an Aboriginal lens to how we reconstituted and reconstructed the Western Regional Football League. And I personally think we actually changed how it conceived itself, how it saw its place in its community, and saw the dynamic of how we have a collective responsibility to each other as opposed to just a number of clubs playing football in competition with each other. That was the easy bit. But how did we think of ourselves as a whole group of people?

That's what Blackfellas do. We think of the collective rather than the individual. That you apply that within the national policy context and suddenly the role of government fundamentally shifts from where it's been without Aboriginal people in the policy environment. That's where I think we should be looking, and that's what I think we should be thinking about when we talk about Aboriginal people in Parliament, when we think about what is it that Aboriginal people bring to enhance the nation as a whole, and that should be a key platform of reconciliation going forward.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: I completely agree yet again Ian, and look-- there's numerous examples from across society that illustrate that. And again, going back to that strength-based discourse, something from a university point of view, I've had the honour of supervising a number of Indigenous PhD students and how often those PhDs have been constructed is it a broader community-based level away from the individual. And that has been a really strength-based discourse that I'm encouraging non-Aboriginal students of mine to engage with as well. Because it's just a much more engaging PhD. You can talk about the broader context than just some third person dialogue. So the same thing is happening in university teaching, that we're working on getting Indigenous knowledges engaged with across the broad stream of subjects. And that's just making the university experience infinitely more important for students. So I completely agree with that.

Conscious of time-- could have a yarn with you forever Ian-- but we'll maybe throw to a few questions. Jess, do we have any questions for us?

JESS: Yes, there's a few questions available. One's mentioned earlier how sovereignty never ceded. The question with this is, how will the Truth-Telling Commission manage this truth?

IAN HAMM: Yeah, I think-- look-- it will come up, and it will come up again and again. This goes to that point I was mentioning before-- how well do people understand what sovereignty means? And then applying that notion into the future and applying it in the circumstances in which Victoria is at the moment, and the circumstances of the future.

I guess one of the things-- and this is-- anything I say is just my personal perspective, but I can be at times, a bit of a practical person. So while the principle of sovereignty is one which certainly I adhere to, the practical effect of it when I look around, there's 60,000 Blackfellas in the state of Victoria, and there's five and 1/2 million people who aren't. So how do I apply sovereignty in that context? And bearing in mind that those 5 and 1/2 million people have rights as well.

So where do we find the ground that brings sovereignty to life without disenfranchising anyone? That's going to be the trick. I don't have any answers beyond trying to contextualise it, but I guess that's part of the challenge of the truth-telling process. It will at least begin the discussions for exploring how these things are resolved. How that we can reach a point where we're not focusing on them simply as outstanding problems from generations ago.

So that's what I think the Truth-Telling Commission will bring to it, but it will throw down the challenge to the rest of us to pick up that gauntlet and say well, what do we do with it? What do we as policy makers do with it? What do we as politicians do with it? What do we as ordinary people in our communities do with it? That's going to be our challenge.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Yeah thanks, and the only thing I'll just add to that is-- it's a great question and it just shows how none of these issues can be put in silos. So truth-telling does involve engaging with sovereignty and engaging with a whole range of other areas as well. So I think it's a collective engagement and a holistic approach that needs to be looked at.

The other thing, just briefly, that we probably haven't mentioned-- we sort of alluded to is truth-telling isn't just about the past, either. The truth telling is about the present, and the future. So what engagements come out of that truth-telling process that relate to now and relate to the future? I think they're also really important ways to look at it as well.

Jess, any other questions?

JESS: Plenty of questions are flooding in. So in regards to the Centre, what is the relationship between the Centre and Reconciliation Australia regarding if there's any risk of competing with Reconciliation Australia? Not so much to be underestimating it or their roles and responsibilities. So what do you see about that?

ANDREW GUNSTONE: There's no risk of that at all. Reconciliation Australia has been enormously supportive of our idea of creating a National Centre and is very, very excited. We'll set up a governance structure. I'll be the Executive Director of the Centre when we set up at the end of the year, and we'll have a governance committee, and we're delighted that Ian's going to be chairing that committee. But we'll certainly have representatives from communities and organisations and key to that will have representatives from Reconciliation Australia on the committee. And really, what we see the role of the Senate is just doing our bit to help increase understandings of reconciliation, which will be good for everyone involved in the movement. And we're certainly aligning ourselves very strongly with Reconciliation Australia.

IAN HAMM: And I think, Andrew, just to flesh that out a bit more, it's important we don't compete. I think too often, people do compete when they don't need to. Working together is actually going to build a stronger outcome-- a better integrated approach. So it is about what Swinburne can contribute to the national agenda of reconciliation, and the Centre's a brilliant contribution towards that.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Yeah.

JESS: Another question-- so, this person would like to your view of embedding the true history of Australia's settlements in the education curriculum nationally as contributing to reconciliation, but also addressing racism and discrimination.

IAN HAMM: Yeah, I think when we speak of true history, true history depends on what angle you're looking at from, and what truth you're seeking to have. I actually really support the Australian Education Standards Authority, I think it's called, who recently said they were expanding curriculum to include an Aboriginal perspective into Australian history, and I think that's absolutely right. Too often, the Aboriginal perspective has been excluded.

Having said that, with the inclusion of the Aboriginal perspective, that's what I really wanted to say rather than the inclusion of the Aboriginal perspective at the exclusion of something else. Because

what's the point of that? That just substitutes one view of the truth for another view of the truth. No, a mature nation-- a mature country has to own all its history. Not just the bits it likes, but all of it. Not just the bits it wants, but the bits it doesn't want.

That's actually the signalling of a mature country-- when it can confront its own history, own its own history, learn from it and then say, we know where we have been-- warts and all-- and we're going forward from here. There has been much good in the Australian narrative since 1788. There's also been much bad in the Australian narrative since 1788. We have to own it all. You don't still get to pick the bits you like, you got to own it all. So the expansion to include the Aboriginal perspective, which is adding to the narrative of the total history of Australia and informing it from-- this is what had happened to us-- that's critical for us being a grownup country populated by grownup people making grownup decisions for the future.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: I completely agree. When I grew up in school I learned-- the only Australian things I learned about was Phar Lap, Ned Kelly, and Don Bradman. And so I had a very, very limited education at school. And that continues to this day, although things have got better. I'm delighted that my three boys are going through their education system learning infinitely more than I did when I went through the education system. So of course, we need to fully teach our children and our adults about the true history of this country from different perspectives, not just from the perspectives that we've always learnt it from.

So the history is not just a blemish, as John Howard referred to back in the 2000s, it's an intrinsic part of what this country has occurred, and so we need to definitely engage with Indigenous knowledges throughout the education system. And again, what we're doing at Swinburne-- one of the Moondani Toombadool Centre staff members, Mat Jakobi, is leading this extraordinary project across the university where all 2,000 higher education courses are now going to engage with Indigenous knowledges. At whatever areas, not just history, but it'll be in sciences and in maths, in law and business, and they will engage with those processes. It's a massive task, so I congratulate Matt for the work he's doing on that. But that's just an example of how we need to look at genuinely engaging with truth-telling in our education systems at every level.

IAN HAMM: And it's not about shaming or embarrassing or guilting. It's about saying we have a multifaceted narrative to tell a multifaceted story, and the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in things beyond history, as you say in the sciences, into how we have world views-- does not the expansion of our knowledge enrich us all? Does not seeing the world through the eyes of others broaden our own perspectives? Shouldn't that not be the higher goal that we all attain for? It's as simple as that. That's what we should be-- that's how we should be thinking about this. That's how we should be looking at it. Not as a confrontation about how we view the world, but simply expanding a view of the world that we live in, and hopefully making it better for our children.

JESS: So I have a question that's kind of, in related to this on our focus on the RAP, and wondering if there are any good examples of organisations which have engaged and educated their staff to understand their role in reconciliation and really engage in reconciliation as individuals?

IAN HAMM: That could be one better directed at Reconciliation Australia. However, I think there are examples of where organisations have looked inward to themselves on their own reconciliation

journey, and thought about, what can we really do that might make a difference that helps our own people become a bit wiser?

So the banks is one, I know of one of the-- big four banks, that in its first Reconciliation Action Plan it was going to change everything. And it was going to do world peace and fix the climate and all that-- that was in the early days of reconciliation plans. In its second plan it said you know, we didn't actually achieve anything we said we were going to do, because we're a bank. What do we do? What can we do that that might matter to Aboriginal people more than anything else, that is in our capacity to actually deliver? We're a bank.

So, one-- access to the financial services we provide and two-- of cause we had branches everywhere-- and this was in the early 2000s, so there were branches everywhere-- we can employ people. We could do that where they live so they don't have to leave town. And that's what they did, and it actually made a difference. That bank felt like it made a difference with the things that it could influence, and it made its own staff feel like that they were actually achieving something.

Their first RAP-- no, they didn't bring about Middle East peace. No, they didn't stop climate change and no, they didn't make the world a better place. Their second RAP-- they opened up their banking products and built some stuff around their relationship with Aboriginal people as clients, and they gave people some jobs where they lived so they didn't have to leave town. That's a good thing. They can actually see that they were making a difference in people's lives.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: And look, I recommend people who are interested in looking at what RAPs are doing, is to go to Reconciliation Australia. They've got a database of all the RAPs, and have a look and seeing what different organisations are doing. We conducted some research at Swinburne last year and the year before, where we were trying to associate and connect people's understandings of cultural competency and their own perceived ideas if they were culturally competent, with their engagements with reconciliation and Indigenous issues.

And what was really interesting in that, was it clearly showed there's no correlation between the level of cultural engagement and the type of cultural activity they might do. So whether they're attending a lecture or doing cultural competency training or work with Aboriginal organisations-- If it's just a single area, there's not a strong correlation. But where the correlation comes from is when there's multiple engagements. So it clearly shows that the more engagements that an organisation does-- and not just has a tick a box where oh yeah, we'll do cultural competency once and then you're culturally competent for the rest of your time-- the more engagements you do with the various different approaches, lectures, events-- all those sort of things-- makes staff engage more in these areas. So the number of engagements is critical as well.

JESS: Thank you, Andrew and Ian. The next one is in your opinion, what makes for great allies on the reconciliation journey?

IAN HAMM: I would have to say people who are patient, people who are open minded, people who are prepared to understand that their journey is contributing to a wider journey. I think that that's critically important. I think people who I think are good allies in this space are those who will tolerate the differences of different viewpoints, different perspectives. That's actually a real key to this.



Beating up people because they don't agree with you actually doesn't do anything for reconciliation in any forum, let alone this one. So I think that they're attributes which I kind of look for. And people who are prepared to sit down and have a discussion, a debate, an argument from time to time. But at the end of it you walk away not bearing grudges, because a lot of this understanding has to be about people being able to get a better handle on who they're talking to. That's critical to this. So they're kind of the attributes I think that are important.

It doesn't have to be captains of industry, it doesn't have to be influencers, TikTok or otherwise. It doesn't have to be those who are seen as community leaders-- all those people are important, but they're no more important than the ordinary punter in the street who just wants to do the right thing. They're just as important, so they're the allies I look for.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: And just to add to that-- I think that's all great-- I think people need to be humble, to recognise that they're not going to know it all, and whether they've got 15 degrees it doesn't really matter-- they need to be humble. And the other issue is allies-- as Reconciliation Australia is calling on us to do-- to move from safe to brave. And to look at ways to be braver in our actions than maybe people have been in the past, and to look at that journey as a journey with themselves as well as the nations.

JESS: Another one in regards to expanding knowledges and truth-telling. How important are documentaries and film as a medium to educate and inspire reconciliation?

IAN HAMM: Yeah. I think they're really useful to be able to do that, provided they have an expanded agenda of what is in documentary filmmaking, and so forth. To tell wider narratives, to tell wider stories. I think, for example-- look, there was a stage where I didn't go and see Aboriginal films-- Aboriginal made films for a while-- or films about Aboriginal people because God, they were depressing. And I kind of live that stuff, like every day. Why am I going to pay good money to go and see it, you know? That's true for me-- it still is a bit. I think one of the things that could be useful for the arts, and look-- importantly, I think the arts have moved way towards that too.

So when you say things like *Bran Nue Dae* I really like that movie because most people won't get why it was so culturally important. It showed Aboriginal people as look-- we dance, we sing, we have fun, take the piss out of ourselves and we can laugh. We're not just heavy with all this bad stuff all the time. I think the arts and filmmaking and documentaries-- yes, there are truths that need to be told that are unpleasant, but they're also an opportunity to tell truths which are quite uplifting, quite enlivening, quite relaxing, as a distraction from other day to day woes and cares. That's what we should be thinking about that with those, because are an opportunity to tell a bigger story of the wider Aboriginal community-- about what's good about us, and not just what's the bad bits.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: And I think documentaries are really important and if people do a bit of research there's lots of different spaces where you can find out-- Reconciliation Australia has websites, SBS, ABC-- there's a lot of websites out there that detail some fantastic documentaries-- some fantastic books to read. And I think that's something that non-Indigenous people, we need to really do rather than just burdening Aboriginal people, cultural load all the time about asking questions, asking questions. There's a lot that we can learn ourselves from documentaries. I think that's a really key strategy to increase all of our own understandings about issues, is to read. And as I

said, there's multiple ways to engage in these spaces. And so I recommend going to-- looking at the Reconciliation Australia website, the NITV website, the ABC websites, and they'll have a lot of resources there.

IAN HAMM: And seeking out successes, too, and engaging with those when you see them. Picking up little things as people go. So look, the Collingwood football club at the moment probably isn't a great example. But one of their vice presidents is Jodie Sizer she's an Aboriginal woman and she's leading how Collingwood is dealing with the mess it's in not just not just as a result of the report that was done. But the broader, and apologies to all Collingwood supporters out there, the broader mess you're in as a football club per se because you're not travelling that well she's leading from a board level how do those. How does Collingwood get its house in order to become a serious contender for a premiership again? That's an Aboriginal success story, believe it or not. That an Aboriginal person is leading a football club getting its act together. Follow it. See what she does, it'll be great.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: We just have time for one more question.

JESS: Yeah, and all the other questions will be probably answered through Yammer?

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Yeah, sure we'll do that. No worries. We'll get back to her, so yeah.

IAN HAMM: I've got to wash my hair after this and not straightaway.

JESS: No worries. So one question, here do you think the story of race in Australia and its ongoing influence on individuals, institutions, and systems need to be a component of reconciliation? And if so, will the new Centre include this focus?

ANDREW GUNSTONE: Absolutely. Addressing racism, addressing white privilege, are critical aspects of any genuine substantive reconciliation process and their key areas of the National Centre and also Swinburne's RAP we do acknowledge that and so again, we have to have hard conversations, we have to have brave conversations, and we need to call this out. There's racism exists in every single organisation in this country, whether it's got an Elevate RAP or not. There is still examples of racism that is impacting significantly on Indigenous staff, and that has to be called out and addressed.

IAN HAMM: It was interesting in regard of race that two surveys in the past couple of weeks. So the ABC'S recent Australia Talks-- its latest one-- has showed that most Australians say that racism exists in this country, or Australia has a race issue. On Inclusive Australia-- and I'm on the board of directors of that-- we had a report commissioned to work with Monash which showed that there had been a rise in direct discrimination. That's when people were overtly discriminatory, and the bulk of that was in the area of race, particularly to Aboriginal people.

There is one thing that I do have to say about when we talk about reconciliation, and a lot of people think it's about giving stuff up. My personal view-- I don't want non-Aboriginal people to lose things, I just want my people to have more things. That for me is what reconciliation is about. This isn't about lowering anybody else, this is about uplifting my people. That's what reconciliation is about for me, and people shouldn't be fearful of it. That more people experiencing a better life-- surely that's a better thing for us all.

ANDREW GUNSTONE: And that's a great way to end on. I just want to just let people know-- it's been really great for us to have a chat to everyone today. Hopefully with poor old Melbourne getting out of COVID at some point, we'll actually be able to do some face to face discussions as well. But look, both from the Swinburne people that are on this call, but also for all the many others from across the country and different organisations-- we're really keen to engage with people at the National Centre so we've already got some really interesting projects on board.

Please feel free to reach out to Ian or myself and have a chat and yeah, we're really keen to see what we can develop in some of the projects. We've got a list of projects listed in our RAP but we certainly are going to be looking at others as well. And we're looking at starting the Centre in November this year, so there's plenty of time for us to start looking at some projects we can engage with. So, like to thank so much Ian for your time in coming today and sharing your expertise and wisdom. Thank you so much and thanks Jess, for getting these questions to us. So thank you everyone, and good afternoon.

IAN HAMM: Good afternoon, everyone.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

