

**RECEPTION TO MARK THE JOURNEY TO RECOGNITION RELAY  
ON BEHALF OF RECOGNISE  
(TASMANIANS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL  
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES)  
REMARKS BY HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR  
THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
MONDAY 27 JUNE 2016**

Good evening and welcome to Government House for this historic event bringing us together to mark the Journey to Recognition Relay in Tasmania.

Ladies and gentlemen, there will be a number of speakers and performers at this event. Before then may I acknowledge among you:

The Honourable Will Hodgman MP, Premier of Tasmania; The Honourable Elise Archer, Speaker of the House; Cassy O'Connor MP, Leader of the Tasmanian Greens; Tanya Hosch, RECOGNISE Joint Campaign Director; Tasmanian Aboriginal Elders; Mr Darren Hine, Tasmania Police Commissioner; Mr Bill Lawson and Lea Lawson; Michael Field AC.

I now have the honour to invite Ms Alison Overeem to Welcome us to Country.

*[Alison Overeem provides Welcome to Country]*

*[Dewayne Everettsmith, Singer-Songwriter, performs]*

Thank you Dewayne.

In the 18 months or so that I have been Governor, I have been pleased to be involved in a number of events with our Tasmanian Aboriginal People, including the launch of Heather Sculthorpe's *Keeping Our Children With Us*, a report to Government and the Aboriginal Community about changes needed to the child protection system in Tasmania.

We were also privileged to be part of the smoking ceremony to cleanse the old Orphan School at St John's Park, now occupied by Kickstart Arts. The purpose of the smoking ceremony, led by Uncle Jim Everett, was to cleanse the building of bad spirits and unhappiness, a very moving ceremony in a place with such a dark past for both Aboriginal children, such as Mathinna and Fanny Cochrane Smith,<sup>1</sup> and non-Aboriginal children in the nineteenth century.

In May this year we visited the Tebrakunna Visitor Centre at Cape Portland where we met Auntie Patsy Cameron and learnt something of the significance of the place, as it is the place where George Augustus Robinson met with Mannalargenna and promised him that in return for stopping the violence, the Aboriginal People would, after a period of exile, be able to return to their lands to roam, hunt and fish at will. Auntie Patsy and Emma Lee invited me to be patron of Mannalargenna Day; Auntie Patsy gave me a shell bracelet made of maireener shells and we took part in a ceremony with red ochre.

After the visit Auntie Patsy Cameron sent me a copy of her book, *Grease and Ochre*, which is based on her Master's thesis, supervised by Henry Reynolds. Reading this excellent book I have gained a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the Eastern Straitsmen and the Aborigines of the Coastal Plains Nation of North Eastern Tasmania and particularly of the relationship between the Straitsmen and their clan wives (or tyereelore). Auntie Patsy argues that in some cases these relationships were as much arranged/consensual marriages as forced abductions of Aboriginal women. Moreover, the clan wives, in many cases, were equal partners with the Straitsmen in developing a new way of life which consisted of a blend of clan and European traditions. The Straitsmen allowed their clan wives to continue their traditional cultural practices and encouraged and relied upon their skills including food gathering skills, particularly in relation to seafood and shell fish. As a result, the Tasmanian Aboriginal culture has survived through the offspring of the clanswomen and the Straitsmen. This provides an alternative and richer narrative to that of predation and cruelty by the sealers to the Aborigines of the Coastal Plains Nation and highlights the significance of Tebrakunna. It also assists in providing a counter to the view that Indigenous Tasmanians and their culture died out with Truganini's death in 1876.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.orphanschool.org.au/aborigines.php>

At our meeting at Tebrakunna, Emma Lee explained to me her proposal for constitutional recognition (at the State level) and I have since read the Report of the House of Assembly's Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal people.<sup>2</sup> I do hope that we do not lose the momentum created by this Committee towards recognition at a State level. And I do hope that in some way I can help the dialogue and build friendship and understanding with the various groups of Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Of course the Journey to Recognition Relay is about recognition at a Federal level and changes to the Australian Constitution — namely the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original inhabitants of this land; the repeal of discriminatory provisions in the Australian Constitution, namely s 25 which countenances the exclusion of persons of a particular race from voting in State elections and the repeal or amendment of the race power in s 51(xxvi) which gives Parliament the power to discriminate against groups of Australians based on race while preserving the Australian Government's ability to pass laws for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recognising the first Australians in our constitution is of course no panacea — but it is a starting point. Constitutional recognition sends the message to Indigenous people that they should be proud of being descended from one of the world's oldest living cultures. As John Glanville of the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence at Redfern has said:

[Constitutional recognition] would help to instil a sense of pride in every Australian child, black or white, by telling them they stand on the shoulders of history. And in doing so, it would help to safeguard these uniquely Australian cultures for future generations to experience and be enriched by.

As the next step in reconciliation, constitutional recognition is the right and decent thing to do.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> Parliament of Tasmania, House of Assembly Standing Committee on Community Development, *Inquiry into the Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal People as Tasmania's First People*, (no. 35) 2015.