

The ENMESHMENT Project Doth Beginneth and Continueth...

Peter Consandine's Wattle Day Newsletter #18

June, 2023

To: Friends, Colleagues, Supporters, Rellies, & Customers (as addressed)

On countless occasions since **The Writer** reached Three Score & Ten – indeed, his Seventys – and especially when they learned that '**Conso**' had been keeping a day-by-day diary since 1st January, 1964, the general response of the informed was along the lines of "Oh, you must write your memoirs". Well, for a considerable period of the past decade I have had to ponder: how does one go about such an enterprise? I put out feelers for both "ghost" writers and co- writers and consulted many of my friends and customers et al and finally – approximately a year ago – I came up with the way I should approach what I am calling my 'ENMESHMENT' Project. This was because not only was I going to delve as fully as possible in to my Personal Diaries but the 41+ years of The RPA political party which I instigated with 4 other fellow-republicans in January, 1982, 3 of whom are now dead.

In a fashion, the 2 lockdown years of the Covid-19 pandemic assisted with my beginning to clear the family shed + national secretariat + home attic of yesteryore 'copy' for Oceania!

I, fortuitously, was able to make sub-leasing of an old gold miner's hut in remote North Eastern Tasmania – the township of Gladstone, 7264 – for 4 months as from late February this very year of 2023. My adorable spouse, partner & soulmate, Jennifer/Jen, extended me a 4 month long 'Leave Pass' and over to the Island State I went and, as it were, 'got started'. Long story short: the hut, per se, was "functional" as I was led to believe but ramshackle-to-the-max what with extension leads but everywhere, bad lighting, uneven floorboards and loose carpeting...in other words: a death-trap for one as UNbalanced, physically, as I am these days. I had no less than 4 falls on the premises – one in which I broke my right hand and another when I split my head open. Before I even got to Gladstone I incurred 2 early-in-the-piece falls at Kettering and Scottsdale. And I hobbled back home to the Mainland after a bit more than 2 months with a ruptured hernia and a damaged right knee. So, I am "in the wars" but 'Soldiering ON' as I know I must!

2023 – when the calendar year is reviewed – shall, I am convinced, be a noteworthy year for our republic in terms of 'keeping the show on the road'. The report in this, Wattle Day Newsletter #18, shall be "sum-totalled" from end-August, 2022 to end May 2023 because of costs on the one hand but timing on the other as shall be borne out.

As ever, I shall notate in this section the PASSING PARADE of those who are no longer in the Land of the Living or, as the case may be, Dead to Me: **Sandra Arnold, Alan Stephens (Snr), Jaap Rhemrev, Max Riddington, Phil Montgomery, Jim Bain, Hilary Mantel, Tony Osborne, Anthea Wieneke, Gracie Di Francesco, John Farquharson, Peter Kennedy-Smith, Bill Lines, Norman Bufton, Paul Knight, John Grandin, Les Holden, Wally Nash, Jimmie Rodgers, Rob Amos, Peter Woods, Bob Templeman, Hubert Evans, Les Carlyon, Peter Reith, Jack & Lena Docwra, Mick Jenkins, Chris Bennett, Phil Rowe, Graham Sumner, John Foley, David Duffy, Quentin Waugh, Jack & Auriel Seagar, Ralph Feller, Tony Britton, John Murray, David Hillman, Jon Hillman, Jim Andersen, Geoff Lutz, Dave Allen, Richard Ely, Ron Austin, Doug Carruthers, Charles Mollison, Lionel McKenzie, Jeff Beck, Renee Geyer, Margaret Blaxell, Maurie Mavin, John Clarke, John Kerin, Doug Mulray, Maree Schweitzer, Leon Isackson, Paul Dahan, Sophie Gebhardt, Noel Cassidy, Russell Thurlow & Billy Bunter.** Vale writ large.

Thursday 1st September, 2022 at a new venue at Oatlands, we staged the 17th Annual Wattle Day Luncheon whereat our Guest Speaker **Andrew ('Billy') Baxter** addressed the topic: 'WHY PEOPLE WANT TO BECOME BRANDS'. Stirring stuff!

On Saturday 3rd September Jen took me for a sumptuous lunch on my Birthday Anniversary at the ritzy Wild Pear restaurant at Dural – coincidentally, National Flag Day.

On Friday 9th September came the announcement that our Monarch of 70+ years, **Queen Elizabeth the Second** had died.

On Monday 12th September Jen & I went on a 4-Day excursion to Shellharbour and the South Coast.

On Tuesday 20th September I did the final tally of just how much money I had raised for The Quest over 40+ years of RPA grassroots involvement = \$3,888,000 in net rounded dollars.

On Thursday 22nd September there was a declared Public Holiday for a National Day of Mourning in the light of the Monarch's passing.

On Friday 14th October our long-term friend **Elaine Birk** came to stay at Hubtopia for a coupla days.

On or about Tuesday 25 October **Craig ('Fozzy') Foster** replaced **Peter ('Fitzy') FitzSimons** as Chair of the Australian Republic Movement and '**Conso**' [that's ME!] duly wrote him a Congratulatory Letter.

On Tuesday 29th November arrangements were put in place with long-term Life Member of RPA, **Laurie Dunlop**, to sub-lease his Gladstone, North East Tasmania, being-gradually-restored, old miner's hut for 4 months in the first half of 2023 so that I could conscientiously begin on the said 'Enmenshmennt Project' in earnest. Princess of Tasmania ferry bookings were made fairly promptly afterwards – Jen graciously granting me Leave of Absence for a third of a year [2023] away from her.

On Tuesday 6th December **Laurie Dunlop** agreed to become The Party's Tasmanian Chapter Convenor.

On Wednesday 7th December Jen and I went to the Valley of the Waters Resort at Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains for a 2-day stayover...Hearty breakfasts here, indubitably! Whilst in the beautiful area Jen & I bought a new teapot at the Teapot Museum in Leura and dined there at the becoming-famous Garage Restaurant and also made a mandatory visit to the Megalong bookstore.

On Thursday 17th December I entered in to a fresh 20-book deal with **Benjamin T. Jones**, now a Central Queensland University History lecturer and Arts academic whose 2018 book 'THIS TIME: AUSTRALIA'S REPUBLICAN PAST & FUTURE' IS, from **The Writer's** perspective, a bible which thoroughly deserved a revival – indeed, a renaissance!

On Monday 9th January 2023 I wrote – by agreement with Jen – a Promissary Note to the effect that whence in North Eastern Tasmania on my own I would NOT try and beat/defy the odds, per se; that I would come back to the Mainland of Australia & Hubtopia if the situation in Gladstone 7264 became UNNbearable.

On Monday 16th January **Miles Harris** began getting my laptop needs (for Tassie) in to place.

On Tuesday 31st January I met up with my new ARM counterpart, **Craig Foster**, at Randwick which proved to be super-positive occasion.

On Sunday 5th February I spent 7 hours photocopying the 319 report sheets of/on the track record of RPA Community Republican Street Meetings conducted by, primarily, myself on The Party's behalf between mid-October 1991 and very early October 1999 for **Ben Jones** as I had determined through correspondence that he is beginning to write his *second* book on The Oz Republic featuring the 1980's & 1990's decades...On the following day I packaged up and mailed the bundle to **Dr Ben**.

On Wednesday 8th February, Jen and I set off for the Deep North – she was going to a private wedding at Mooloolabah on the Sunshine Coast...I stopped off at Paddington, Inner Western suburb of Brisbane, to negotiate banquet dinner arrangements at the Nota Restaurant for the Republican of the Year 2023 celebration for the gong-winner, **Ben Jones**, on Saturday, 22nd July...Jen & I stayed with our ex-neighbours **Jean & John McCartney** at Mt Coolum for a coupla nights and a further night with Life Member **Mike Burke** and his bride, **Jacqui Rowntree**, at Ilkley. Before leaving SEQ, I held discussions with my RRA counterpart, **David Muir**, at St Lucia and Sponsor,

Mark McIvor, at Surfers Paradise before trekking back to Sydney via a Yamba stopover. It is worth noting that Muir – to quote him affirmatively – believes that the ARM ‘Australian Choice’ model for the Oz Republic is “the politicians’ republic on steroids”. Hey!

On Thursday 16th February I ordered a second batch of **Ben Jones’s** book for select issue in and around and more particularly Victorian and Tassie contacts; On Saturday morning 18th February – after spending weeks “prepping” for my Away-Adventure – I set off for the Deep South – delivering product to **Megan Walker** at Mooroopna, on the Saturday; latest boxes of “cleared” records to **Colin Stephens** at Heathcote, obtaining last writing tips from **Mark Harris** at Ballarat before ending the Sunday 19th at Tenby Point with **Laurie Dunlop** and his bride **Sandi**; on the Monday 20th delivering product to **George Dyer** at Balwyn, lunching with Sponsor, **Fred Carter**, at South Melbourne, afternoon kaffee klutching with **Meredith Doig** at Hawksburn before rocking out to Beaconsfield Upper to dine and stay the night with my brother-in-law, **John Farrer**, (then) on the Tuesday 21st having Morning Tea with my long-term friend, **Cheryl Whelan**, at Caulfield, Lunch with new friend, **Janice Collins**, at Richmond before heading out to Moonee Ponds and the Electoral Office of **Bill Shorten**, the MHR for Maribyrnong to brief **Daniel White**, Convenor of Labor for the Republic, on happenings-in-general before lobbying at Brunswick to both deliver product to long-time customer, **Helen Breier**, and stayover with her after dining out, (then) on the Wednesday 22nd – en route the Geelong Quay and the Bass Strait ferry – I did some rollchecks at the AEC office in downtown Melbourne, dropped off some “copy” to another of my old friends, Life Member **Dana Serelis** at Prahran and as I awaited at Geelong Quay and a boarding call I held a ‘live’ debate on my mobile phone with old monarchical rival, **Philip Benwell**, on Radio 2GB, Sydney apropos the Monarchy versus the Republic issue...**Chris O’Keefe’s** afternoon program ‘THRASH IT OUT’ being the medium. Got to hand it to Benwell though, inasmuch as he and his fellow Monarchist League colleagues don’t try to push the fallacious line that Australia already is a ‘Crowned Republic’ as ACM-aligned monarchists repeatedly and mischievously do.

On Thursday 23rd February – after a rough crossing and not getting a wink of sleep – I arrived at Devonport...I decided to change my early plans and, very tired, split for Gladstone via a visit to Party Member’s **Lisa Lewis’s** abode at George Town...boy, oh boy did I sleep like the dead when I eventually got to Laurie’s hut!

On Friday 24th February I drove in to Scottsdale to make ALL necessary arrangements for UPcoming times before driving all day to Maydena where I overnighted with long-term Party Member and former Senate candidate, **Bert Lawatch**.

On Saturday 25th February I got my hair washed at the Exper-Tease hair salon at Claremont en route to a lovely afternoon kaffee klutsch in downtown Hobart with long-term friends **Henry & Margaret Reynolds** before heading to Mt Stuart to stay a coupla nights with other long-term friends **Leo Foley & Cheryl Price**; (then) on Monday 27th I returned to my Gladstone hut via both Launceston & Scottsdale where I put my affairs & needs in order for the proverbial ‘Long Haul’.

On Tuesday 28th February I had lotsa local arrangements to make and I got about attending to ALL that I could...setting UP truly took me the best part of the next 3 days. But, it was a struggle from the get-go albeit I kept an optimistic outlook. I shall write fully of my trials & tribulations at a future time. However, suffice to say/admit that I was ‘on the back foot’ from very early on and eventually – on the late afternoon of Saturday 1st April – Yeah, April Fool’s Day – I tripped on the front veranda of the hut whilst looking to see if a package for Laurie had arrived...Yep, I broke my right hand – two fingers thereof – which in X-rays at the Ochre clinic in Scottsdale in subsequent days meant I had to be referred to Launceston General Hospital for hand surgery which saw my right hand put in to a splint which, effectively, prevented me from both writing and touch-typing, anymore – for the time being.

From Sunday 2nd April I was on ‘R & R Leave’ ...I had to fill in time until I could depart Tassie on a revised return date to the Mainland on the night of Tuesday 2nd May. So, I was greatly set back, scheduling-wise. I was able though to prepare for the coming expansive mailing exercise – stamps + envelopes + return address stickers etc. A week later – on the evening of Tuesday 11 April – I ‘owned up’ to Jennifer that I’d be quitting Gladstone around the time she was flying back to Sydney in very early May. That was a factor in the equation – Jen’s coming down to pay me a visit and thereafter visiting a long-term friend of hers in Lindisfarne – I had to wait for Jen to arrive at Launceston airport where I picked her up on Sunday afternoon 23rd April. From here, Jen & I stayed a night at the Auldington Hotel and dined at the Rupert & Hound restaurant. Once we got to the Gladstone hut we began sight-seeing together out of the township – checking out over the days 24th – 29th April inclusive, the Little Blue Lake, Eddystone’s Lighthouse, Ringarooma, Fingal, St Marys and, in turn, Scamander on the East Coast – some hairy

“fortune-shunting” days, to be sure. From Scamander we checked out Petrel Point, St Helens, Binalong Bay, the Cheese Factory at Pyengala, St Columba’s Falls and, not forgetting, the notorious Pub-in-the-Paddock and lastly Musselroe Bay.

On Sunday 30th April together Jen & I packed up and loaded my car which quite exhausted both of us. I said my Fond Farewells to the locals who I got to know and who assisted me no end: sweet ‘n’ luvly **Lyn Fulmer, Dale & Anna Brown** the Proprietors of the General Store and Joint Post Officers, neighbours **Johnny & Chrissie Robertson** and **Owen & Debbie Jepson**. I ensured also a most appreciative acknowledgement to my super-caring Scottsdale physician, **Dr Ali Ghorbani**, too.

On Monday 1st May following my final appointment at LGH I dropped Jen off at the Bus Stop from where she would commute down to Hobart. I (then) picked up and paid for the printing jobs done for me at Foot & Playsted...**Ross Martin** & his most accomplished personal assistant **Anah Chapman** were most professional in this regard and very nice people, what’s more. I overnighted in Deloraine in a very cramped room at the Mountain View Country Inn. And, after an absorbing few hours in downtown Deloraine on Tuesday 2nd May I split for the wharf at Devonport.

Now, as if I hadn’t injured myself enough whence in Tassie, I got the middle finger on my left hand caught in the door to the ablutions block on the morning of Wednesday 3rd May. Clumsy of me!

Back on the Mainland on Wednesday 3rd May I began my guided rounds firstly at Albert Park (**Fred Carter**), secondly at Richmond (**Sarah Jones**) and thirdly at Balwyn (**George Dyer**) before heading out to Thomastown to sort out matters at the (rubber) Stamp Store and, thereafter, lobbying at **Chris Doig’s** property at regional Denver where I overnighted.

I stayed on at Chris’s until late afternoon of Thursday 4th May when I ventured cross-country to Heathcote and **Colin Stephens’** place where I overnighted. Whilst here, I signed Colin up to Life Membership of The RPA.

On Friday 5th May I drove 720kms dropping off at Mooroopna (**Megan Walker**), Albert Lake, Wagga Wagga (**John & Margaret Rumens**), Cootamundra (**Rick Martin**), Cowra (**Andrew Mulligan**) en route to Blayney and **Elaine Birk’s** place where I overnighted.

On Saturday 6th May, I ventured via South Bowenfels, suburban Lithgow (**Bevan Ferguson**), then Wentworth Falls (**Jim Boddy**) then to the other side of Wenty Falls and **Matt Quinn’s** being-renovated home where I watched – with an obliging host – the coronation of Australia’s new Monarch: **King Charles the Third** and overnighted. I mean, good republicans must be good royal watchers too. Yes?

On Sunday afternoon 7th May I humbly returned to Hubtopia, Castle Hill in North-West Sydney thankfully in one-piece! In the **Peter FitzSimons** column [5 Minutes with Fitz] in the Sun-Herald newspaper this very day the journalist interviewed no other than his Australians for Constitutional Monarchy adversary, **David Flint**, the National Convenor. Flint, obviously somewhat uncomfortable, (a) denied he’d ever been a republican; (b) admitted that he, as a then Member of the Sydney University Labor Club of which he was a Founder joined in Sydney street protest demonstration when Labor Prime Minister, **Gough Whitlam**, was sacked by the Governor-General, **John Kerr** in November 1975; (c) declared he was a monarchist because he viewed Monarchy as the best, most stable form of government; (d) agreed that **King Charles the Third** doesn’t enjoy the same level of affection as his impeccable mother.

On Wednesday 17th May I ordered *another* batch of 20 books from **Dr Ben Jones**.

On Tuesday 23rd May I dropped off to **Marcia Pacella** at Galston and **Rodney Parsons** at Hornsby. Also this day, I wrote up a Media Release on Why **Ben Jones** was selected at 2023 RPA Republican of the Year 2023 and it may be found elsewhere in this RPA newsletter.

On Wednesday 24th May – because of inter-related circumstances – I very belatedly joined the Peugeot Car Club.

On Thursday 25th May I wrote to **David Muir** of RRA pointing out the glaring error on the first line of the opening paragraph of his organisation’s specially-prepared Autumn Extra edition of Constitutional Conversation viz: “the coronation of **King Charles the Second**”! Well, we ALL make mistakes. However, given that RRA mails its quarterly bulletins to politicians and other prominent constitutional reformers Australia-wide, it is extraordinary that such an error was NOT sighted and corrected before going to print!

On Saturday, 27th May the “scheduled” RPA Annual National Convention #35 at Scottsdale proceeded successfully...the Record of the “event” is featured in the body of this RPA newsletter.

MEDIA RELEASE OF 23RD MAY 2023

Why Benjamin T. Jones has been awarded the RPA gong as Oz Republican of the Year 2023

Peter Consandine, National Executive Director of The Republican Party of Australia is - along with his perpetual grassroots promotion of an Australian Republic – a bookseller of renown and has been since the publishing in 2018 of the book by **Ben Jones** titled ‘THIS TIME: Australia’s Republican Past and Future’ a passionate advocate of its being widely red.

However, when **Peter Consandine** learnt in early 2023 that **Dr Jones** was in the throes of writing a second book on the important issue – one which would be a successor to his first brilliant effort – recognition needed to be acknowledged for an UPcoming work which would, doubtless, assist in keeping the Oz Republican Quest alive in the period leading up to the second Oz republican referendum which, UNfortunately, may NOT be staged until 2025 at the earliest.

Thus, **Dr Jones** deservedly won the Award from a “timeliness” perspective.

‘THIS TIME’, by the way, is enjoying something of a renaissance insofar as **Consandine** has, since 2018 indeed, already distributed 46 copies of **Jones**’s signed copies of the book with – in the immediate near-future – the prospect of distributing at least *another* 20 copies!



Record of the Proceedings of the 35th Annual Republican Convention scheduled for Scottsdale, N.E. Tasmania, 7260 on Saturday, 27th May, 2023

Topic 1: The three (3) Referenda being put to The Oz People by the Albo-led Labor Gummint in the remaining period of their First Term &/OR in their Second Term...

(a) The Voice to the Federal Parliament;

(b) Recognition of Local Government [the 3rd Tier] in an amended Federal Constitution – bearing in mind that this proposal has been defeated already *twice* before;

(c) The Second Republican Referendum

Apropos Topic #1 (a)...That The RPA remains purely neutral apropos the YES & NO cases; The RPA neither plumps for the former nor in any way, shape or form does it advocate a negative vote regarding the latter; That The RPA Membership broadly exercises a conscience vote; That The RPA, cognisant of there appearing to be NO Plan 'B' to cater for an UNSuccessful YES vote, is of the considered view, that the Albo-led Labor Gummint needs to prepare for the 'Way Ahead' in the light of a necessity to work more coherently in the implementation of a fresh 'Bridging the Gap' policy. Of course, the implementation of any or all interim arrangements for putting the successful YES case practicably into operation may suffice as a theoretical Plan 'B'. *If space permits in the balance of this newsletter then the National Voice to Federal Parliament issue shall be further broached.

Apropos Topic #1 (b)...The RPA holds fast to its long-held view that the country is OVER-governed and that at some stage there should be a major Inquiry into the overall Australian Governmental system...therefore, it remains steadfast that there should be NO *third* Commonwealth referendum to recognise Local Government in the Federal Constitution;

Apropos Topic #1 (c)...The RPA remains 100% in favour of an Australian Republic notwithstanding its Presidium model – for a 3-person Presidency – remains its Direct Election preference.

Topic #2: The Nuclear Issue...has the time come for The RPA to make a more serious and therefore considered policy apropos the appropriate energy mix for Australia? It was noted that small, modular nuclear reactors were now in full production per the Hitachi and Westinghouse corporations! The appropriate resolution was that since nuclear energy forms part 'n' parcel of The RPA's energy mix, already, that the status quo prevails.

Topic #3: There be Established named the Republican Heritage Fund to ensure future funding for The RPA grassroots Oz Republican Champions.

Topic #4: (well in advance of time) Dual Nomination of new ARM Chairman, **Craig ('Fozzy') Foster** and his even newer female Co-Chair, **Nova Peris**, as RPA Joint Oz Republicans of the Year 2025 whilst The Party honours **Geoffrey Dutton** as RPA Republican of the Year, in Memoriam, for Year 2024.


Topic #5: That **King Charles** be written to and formally asked to convince his State representatives i.e. the Governors of Western Australia & Queensland to change their existing Monarch's Birthday Annual Holiday to that

of June in lieu of as heretofore and thus – and very belatedly – chime in and share the holiday in legion with the other 4 States and 2 Territories.

Topic #6: That Life Membership to be awarded to **Jean Lin + Colin Stephens** who have earnt their gongs and **Joyce Phillips** who has been a long time Supporter cum Customer and Member of The Party but who is now in her dotage.

Topic #7: Regarding the idea of Reviving the Campaign for a Tasmanian State Republic – YES or NO? A pronouncedly big and decisive 'NO' as interest in Tassie for *this* Cause has patently diminished, over time.

Upcoming RPA Events



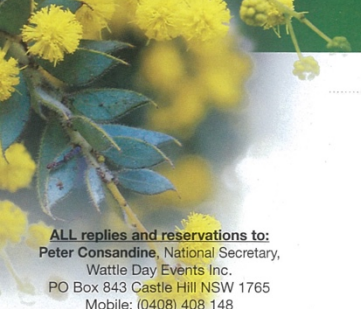
INVITATION to the BANQUET
for the 33rd RPA Australian Republican of the Year

BENJAMIN T. JONES

Dr Ben Jones is, of course, the esteemed author of the landmark 2018 textbook 'This Time: Australia's Republican Past & Future' now enjoying a renaissance whilst he writes a much-anticipated follow-up work; Dr Ben is also a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Central Queensland, Rockhampton & also a Member of the ARM Queensland Executive.

Venue: Nota Chef's Feast, reputedly Brissie's most prestigious restaurant....
224 Given Terrace, Paddington Queensland 4064
Date: Saturday, 22nd July 2023 | **Time:** 6.30pm for 6.45pm
Dress Mode: Cocktail | **Cost per Person:** \$145* | **RSVP:** Close of Business, Wednesday, 19th July 2023
MC & Toastmaster: PAUL TULLY, Ipswich City Councillor
* 5 course international banquet with attendant selected wine for each of the 5 banquet courses

ALL replies and reservations to:
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INVITATION to the
18TH ANNUAL WATTLE DAY Luncheon

For Your Information!

is/are invited to CELEBRATE Wattle Day 2023
and another day out for the Reconciled Republic with **Guest Speaker:**

GLENN DRUERY

Glenn is, of course, the acknowledged 'Preference Whisperer' of Australian Politics
Glenn's Talk-Topic: 'THE MORAL IDEAL of AUSTRALIAN MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY'
Venue: Bells Road Social Cafe, Shop #1, Bells Road, OATLANDS NSW 2117
Date: Friday, 1st September 2023 | **Time:** 1.30pm for 1.45pm
Dress Code: neat, smart & casual - for the times and for the climes
Cost per Person: \$95* | **RSVP:** Close of Business, Wednesday, 30th August 2023
MC and Toast Master: SCOTT PETERSON, Convenor of The RPA's [A.C.T.] Canberra Chapter

ALL replies and reservations to:
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*3 Courses of fully Italo-Australian fare including ALL the Republican Premium red and white wine and bubbly and Republican Sublime coffee the invitee can consume/imbibe

All Good Getting A Happy Wattle Day!

John C.



COMMENTARY

DAILY CARTOON | JOHANNES LEAK



ANTHONY ALBANESE

Voice of all people to unite us in this moment of truth

The 1967 referendum was powerfully symbolic, a moment of national idealism. In that year, 90 per cent of Australians voted to remove a harmful, discriminatory relic. In 2023, our generation can go one better.

Instead of removing a provision that no longer speaks for who we are, we can make a positive change that speaks for the future we seek to build. This can be a moment of Australian unity. An extraordinary opportunity for every Australian to be counted and heard – to own this change and be proud of it, and truly live the spirit of the fair go.

After the tumult of colonisation, we have lived through a silence, a long tide of denial gnawing away at the shores of our spirit. And an entire people have been kept so long in the margins, surviving against the odds, surviving even against misguided good intentions. We have to come to grips

with the past because a country that does not acknowledge the full truth of its history is burdened by its unspoken weight. But we learn. We acknowledge. And bit by bit, as we each admit each truth into our midst like a shaft of light, we are easing that burden. Moments of truth that include the Freedom Rides, the 1967 referendum, Mabo, Wik, the Redfern Speech, the Apology to the Stolen Generations and the red sand captured in a photo on that brightest of days, forever flowing from Gough Whitlam's hand into Vincent Lingiari's.

None stands as an answer in itself, but each step forward sees us narrowing the distance between reality and our perception of ourselves – and the people we aspire to be. We sometimes speak of ourselves as a young nation, but we are one of the world's oldest democracies. Our continent is home to the world's oldest continuing culture, which we are at last com-

ing to recognise as the great source of pride that it must be.

Even from a geological perspective, Australia is home to the oldest continental crust on Earth, with parts of Western Australia's Gascoyne region clocking in at 4.4 billion years old. So perhaps it's only fitting that we are not a nation given to acting in haste.

Last Friday, it was the sixth anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which emerged from the First Nations National Constitutional Convention, whose delegates were all selected by their communities.

If you want to reach back a little further, it is nine decades since William Cooper – that great Yorta Yorta man and trade unionist – began drawing up the petition that constituted the first call for something akin to a voice to parliament.

To those who keep saying now isn't the time, I ask: When is?

This hasn't been shorted. There have been no shortcuts. Nor is this something that began in Canberra. This has been a grassroots movement, the culmination of years of discussion, consultation and hard work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This will be about recognition of this continent's first people in the nation's birth certificate, providing a people what Marcia Langton and others have termed "a rightful place in the nation".

The voice won't be a funding

body. It won't run programs. It won't have a power of veto. We know that from the Solicitor-General's opinion, we know from former High Court judges. We know it from leading legal academics. And we know it from constitutional experts, including Megan Davis and George Williams.

It will be about consultation, an ongoing conversation. A body that will be representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and chosen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A body made up of representatives from every state and every territory. Representatives from towns and remote communities and everywhere between.

When tried on a smaller scale, it's clear that when decisions are made after listening to the people on the ground, the results are positive. Look at the Indigenous-led community health clinics extending life expectancy and improving the experience of people having to undergo dialysis or treatment for rheumatic heart disease.

Look at the Indigenous Ranger Programs that have tapped into a great well of wisdom, cutting feral animal numbers and boosting protection for our unique natural environment by employing local people to work on country. And look at justice reinvestment programs that are reducing incarceration rates. If you want to see that in action, look at Bourke, where

the community-led Maranguka Project is delivering results.

If you want to break that down into dollar terms, the Maranguka Project saves the NSW economy five times what it costs to operate. The difference it makes to people's lives, though, is beyond measure.

Amid the fog of fiction and misunderstanding these past few months, it's important to spell it out again. This isn't about politics. This isn't about politicians. This is about people. People striving to make themselves heard across our great nation. In the regions and beyond in the remotest corners of our vast continent.

All those voices rising across Australia like the headwaters of a thousand creeks and rivers joining into a mighty and wonderful current that will converge around each one of us as we step into the booth on referendum day.

Amid it all, there's another echo of the 1967 referendum – the voice to parliament is supported by nearly 90 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We are fortunate to be here in this moment in history, where we have within our hands the chance to make a positive change that will last for generations.

A change that will outlast us.

This is an excerpt from Anthony Albanese's Lowitja O'Donoghue Oration, which will be delivered in Adelaide on Monday.

Hey! Food for Thought!!