

Ways forward for Quakers and other concerned Australians to support First Nations Peoples

Preamble

This we can say:

Millennia before Britain occupied Australia there were many complex indigenous relationships to country, which included the entire continent and its surrounding seas.

First Nations Peoples (FNP) were unlawfully and immorally deprived of their lands and liberties through force of arms, by the application of legal fictions such as terra nullius and the ignoring of specific articles from the British Crown for the protection of FNP rights.

The ongoing trauma felt by FNP as a result of past and continuing policies and attitudes of Australian governments and many non-FNP Australians, will be felt for generations to come.

It will take time, love and support for the healing of all. Reconciliation between FNP and non-FNP can only happen when we engage in compassionate listening, acknowledge past wrongs, and work together to create a process where the need for self-determination is acknowledged and respected.

The basic building block of a reconciliation process is created when trust, respect and deep relationships are undertaken by people engaging with each other, and learning from each other at all levels.

We believe that the process to achieve national reconciliation, freely agreed between FNP and non-FNP, should be supported by Quakers. This may include but not be limited to appropriate amendments to the constitution; and treaties, agreements and reparation documents at both national and regional levels.

Quakers will seek to create opportunities for FNP and non-FNP Australians to come together to develop a process of reconciliation and will bear witness to ensure fairness and equality for FNP if they choose to follow this course.

Role of Quakers in support of First Nations Peoples

Involvement in the reconciliation process.

What actions?

- Acknowledge our advantage and our responsibility to educate ourselves with regards to history, culture, and spirituality
- Individually and collectively reflect on right relationships with FNP
- Make contact at a local level
- Identify and offer tools, for example, AVP and other modes of non-violence training, governance, mediation and negotiation skills; and provide facilitation if and when requested.

We ask Regional Meetings to report to AYM about their work with FNP, reflecting on these questions adapted from Reconciliation Australia:

- What might I do differently and what might Quakers do differently to build better relationships with the First Nations Peoples of Australia?
- What might I do differently and what might Quakers do differently to have and show respect for the First Nations Peoples of Australia?
- What might I do differently and what might Quakers do differently to bear witness to the ongoing conditions of First Nations Peoples' health, education, land rights and other areas related to self-determination?

Supporting quotes from Quaker documents

All our actions and hopes are grounded in our Quaker way. Specifically, we refer to our testimonies, to the postscript to the 1656 epistle from the elders at Balby, to Advices & Queries, and to the Bible.

Luke 6:42

How can you think of saying 'Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

New Living Translation (www.biblehub.com)

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For thousands of years before 1788, this country was lived in by various Aboriginal peoples, at one with the land. Through colonisation, much of their land and culture has been lost to them, and their children have been taken from them; they have suffered the injustice of racism, and material, psychological and spiritual deprivation. Can we acknowledge with sorrow the loss of life and the ongoing destruction of their languages, families and communities, appreciate the depth and strength of Aboriginal beliefs and values and learn from Aboriginal people and accept the gifts they have for all of us? Can we all, as Australians, work towards living together as equals with mutual understanding and respect?

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The land of Australia is not our possession. We are no more than temporary guardians of it; neither the first nor, probably, the last. In the brief time of European settlement, vast areas of this country have been damaged. Do you try to live in harmony with the land, knowing that you are part of it? Do you protect and husband its water and other resources? Do you look with respect on the claims and rights of others to share in the wealth and freedoms of Australians?

this we can say 5.28, p.260

At a meeting on cultural diversity I was shocked to hear myself accused of racism. Me? The most tolerant of souls, I had fondly thought. The issue was my preoccupation with getting on with the job. It took me some time to accept that some cultures find this task-orientation oppressive, ignoring as it does the value of process, of giving things due time.

Further, that people of other (more process-oriented) cultures could feel consistently devalued because of the domination of this value system in Australian society.

Laurel Thomas 1997

this we can say 5.34, p.264

For reconciliation to be effective, it must become more than a cosy word that makes us feel good. Real reconciliation reflects *actual relationship*. It demands the honesty and courage of self-knowledge, and the letting go of many previously held attitudes. To work for real reconciliation, we shall need to summon fresh Light to help us face what we must about ourselves and our culture. We shall need a spiritual awareness that challenges our comfortable parameters, and a faith strong enough for us willingly to go where we may never have ventured before.

In our desire to redress the wrongs done to Aboriginal peoples, we have focused on alleviating their material suffering with measures we consider appropriate—better housing, education, health-care, greater representation in our whitefella political structures, more jobs, more money. We want to be fair; we want to be generous; we want to include them in our life here. It is often hard to accept that, as long as our ecocidal practices continue, our well-meant offerings are frequently experienced as a continuation of the genocidal policy of assimilation. How can we discover what Aboriginal peoples need if we consider ourselves to be the hosts in this land? How shall we ever listen to the Earth's needs if our own desires clamour above our ability to hear?

Susannah Brindle, 2000

this we can say 5:35 Finding Connections, p.265

During 2001, our Brisbane Meeting explored points of connection between Quaker spirituality and that of the Indigenous peoples with whom we share this country ...

To prepare a framework for the discussions, Susan Addison and Lynne Laver, as co-convenors, met with Mary Graham, a Kombumerri person who is also affiliated with the Waka Waka group. Together, we identified much common ground including:

- Appreciation of silence
 - Sense of awe in nature
 - Caring for the land (e.g. our meeting house rainforest) can be a spiritual act
 - Respect for the whole person, including those who are different
 - Deep sharing in circles
 - Simplicity through non-hierarchical, non-competitive, non-materialistic society
 - Decision-making by general agreement and concord
 - No priests as intermediaries—the individual contributes his or her abilities or gifts for the benefit of the whole society
 - Spirituality permeates the whole of life—no holy days, everyday life is sacred.
- Susan Addison 2001*

Ho'opono'opono - Hawaiian Healing Process

I'm sorry

Please forgive me

I love you

Thank you