

HOW TO ENGAGE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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First I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people on whose land we do meet. I'd also like to say I'm nervous and I'll try and keep my voice. I'd like to acknowledge our elders in the room today, the ATSIC Board of Commissioners, the Regional Council chairpersons, regional councillors and everybody here who is involved in the development of programs, services, policies for the betterment of our people.

I'd just like to talk a little bit about my own heritage. I was born in Melbourne, my father's mother, she's a Gunnai from Lake Tyers. My father's father is Gunditjmara down at Lake Condor there, and my mother, she's Yorta Yorta, at Shepparton way there.

I'd like to say thank you and ATSIC for inviting me, to present on how to engage Indigenous people in the policy development process and just to give you an overview of my presentation, talk a little bit about family, share some Indigenous perspectives about how to engage Indigenous people, look at some current examples, and then talk about a collaborative model which I developed for non-Indigenous organisations wanting to work with Aboriginal community-based organisations.

I'd like to quote the words of my great grandfather, Chadrack James, who wrote in an article entitled, *The Wrongs of the Australian Aboriginal*, which was printed 1 May 1929 in the *Australian Inter-Collegian*. He said:

“It's a tragic fact that the condition of my people still remains a problem for which all the wise heads of government of this land for 100 years, have failed to find a satisfactory solution.”

He went onto say that:

“The governments of Australia have had the Aborigines for over a century in their hands and have not yet taken them out of the experimental stage. What have they done to educate them to take their places worthily in the community? The Australian whites, with justifiable joy and pride, boasted their marvellous achievements in countless phases of life amongst their own people.

Do they consider the weekly ration, the annual supply of blankets and adequate compensation for the inestimable benefits that they are daily deriving from this land, which by divine right, belongs to us?

When will the Australians wake up to their national duty, their responsibility and obligation to us? They complain of our ingratitude.

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We ask, 'when will they pay the debt of gratitude they owe to us for the untold gain that has come to them through our irredeemable loss?'

In the same article, grandfather Chadrack highlighted the following points:

“There is a great deal of unemployment amongst my people which accounts for their poverty and distress. Nearly 75 per cent are living in a semi-starved condition. Our people are as well skilled as the white Australians in terms of shearing, axemen, sleeper hewing, road making et cetera, but, are denied licences and employment in these fields. Some are intellectually fit to fill some positions in the government service, but, we are disbarred from taking these positions.

Reserves for the use of Aborigines have been set up, but, Aborigines are denied the right of using the land. Many of the reserves have river frontage and could be cut up into irrigation blocks and a lot of capable Aborigines, where they could settle permanently and make homes of their own. Our girls at the age of 14 years, are forcibly taken from their mothers and sent out to service when they need their mother's protection the most.”

Grandfather Chadrack recommend the following:

“I strongly advise that Aboriginal people throughout the Commonwealth be placed under the federal government instead of remaining under the control of the Aborigines Protection Board. The appointment of a native administrator, as he would be in sympathy with our needs, with the needs of our people; a native representative in the House of Parliament to voice our needs and disabilities; native protectors in each state to see that our people were well cared for.”

Grandfather Chadrack went on to say that, he believed the new day was dawning for his people and that he held hope that the influences and prejudice that had been operating against them for a century, keeping them in a servile condition and withholding from them their natural rights, is now giving place to genuine sympathy for his people.

He wrote that in 1929, and I only came across the article not so long ago. I was proud to be part of his bloodline. I know that he is also not the only Aboriginal man, or Indigenous person that was speaking along those lines back in those days. So, I wonder what the plight of Aboriginal Australia would be today if these changes that they asked for were made back then? If only the governments and their officials had listened then, I wonder whether we'd be here today? I wonder if the disadvantaged position that we find many of our Indigenous people in, would be far less than the statistics present? We can only wonder. But now, those of us here today who are in a position to be able to make an impact, can change and influence policy as we learn from the past.

And in terms of learning from the past, on the way here on the plane, I was reading the *In-Flight* magazine and I read this article on Scott Hocknull, the Young Australian of the Year, and he was quoted as saying that, "I see an ancient landscape waiting to tell us how to care for it. We just have to read its message." He also believes that we could be fighting a losing battle environmentally. Now, this fellow is a palaeontologist and I think that's to do with museums and stuff. I'm not real sure - yes, bones. So, he's into the bones. But, what he's saying is, in terms of fighting a losing battle environmentally, if today's biologists do not work more closely with those in his own field. Furthermore he says, "Looking into the past can help us protect species and plants in the future, yet such teamwork is rarely employed."

With regard to teamwork, we have among us Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are visionaries, leaders, role models from each state and territory who have contributed to the development of our people. Today and over the next two days, we will hear from many of them as was the case with our first speaker, Ms Pat Turner. With regards to our Indigenous leaders, they have listened to the political landscape of our forbears and have a good understanding of the issues and political processes. I only hope that we can read their messages and make the appropriate changes as we lay policy foundations for the new millennium.

In terms of my presentation, I want to acknowledge that most participants here today may already undertake the topic that I'm here to talk about. Therefore, I ask that you contribute your knowledge, your skills and experience to assist in the development of those among us to ensure that this is both a productive and insightful time. As you are aware, this topic plays an important role in the holistic and systemic development of Indigenous people, organisations and communities.

So, how do you engage Indigenous people in the policy development process? What I'd like, if you could take a couple of minutes to please write down how you currently engage Aboriginal people in the policy development process and then what we'll do, if you could give some feedback, share some of your ideas. Because what I'd like to do then, is to share some Indigenous perspectives from a South Australian point of view, some of their thoughts that they raised in relation to this particular topic.

So, if you could take a couple of minutes on your table just to write that down and we'll put some music on.

Lynette Dawn: I'm from Department of State and Regional Development in New South Wales. We did it as a table. Some of the things that we had was working with peak bodies and trying to work towards achieving shared vision with peak bodies. Having Aboriginal representatives on committees and working parties and also employing Aboriginal people in the policy development process, particularly in government sector departments and things like that. And also hosting and attending community meetings, networking events and information sessions. They were some of the things that we raised.

Richard Young: Thank you.

Winsome Matthews: Just before I start, Richard, your great grandfather actually taught my mother how to read and write down in Cumranjung Mission. So I know the stories of Chadrack James.

My name is Winsome Matthews. I'm from the New South Wales Department for Women. We're about to undertake a state-wide survey on the prioritised needs of Aboriginal women for the Commonwealth government through the Office of Status of Women. How we are going about that is, by actually doing a survey with community against the backdrop of activities of these government agencies, so that our people in communities get an idea of where government is at, so they can actually provide the information to progress the way forward to be advancing. So, we're not duplicating, or going over old stuff.

We look at a consolidation with communities, to get them to voice. I ask the question, "Where to from here?" And then they state through negotiation, the type of issues that effect them, or the issues that they want to raise from the perspective of themselves, their role in the community and family, then from their family perspective, then from their community perspective. Then we go into a de-colonised process of negotiation, which then sets up pretty much a format - the first format of drafts, second format of draft, back to negotiation and then implementation with a query after three months of implementation by people who were involved in the original survey. So, we do it in New South Wales.

Brian Butler: I'm the Zone Commissioner for South Australia and I think that my responsibility, or part of my responsibility in this issue to making sure, or making it possible for people within our communities to understand the difference between governance and government.

Lillian Holt: I'm from Melbourne University. I was saying to Brian and May that I wasn't going to answer that question, Richard. Because I actually think that it's somehow always Indigenous peoples that have to make the moves. They always have to make the adaptation. I'm interested at this point of my survival and existence in this country as to how to engage white people and the changing of white people's attitudes. Because, I think there's so much power and privilege invested in white supremacy in this country and have touched on that with her talk, that it's almost insidiously embedded in the minds and heads of peoples.

And I tell you what, I work with so-called clever fellas in this country and that's people who are academics and bureaucrats in Melbourne University, and they have an incredible ignorance in relation to Aboriginal people. Apart from that, they do not wish to know, they're either unwilling or incapable of knowing and it's somehow, after 30 years of working formally in Aboriginal education, Aboriginal affairs, I'm really exhausted from not being heard.

Somehow it's always Aboriginal people who have to give up and to adapt. And I think that's what's happened in Aboriginal affairs, and this is just my comment as to why I resist doing an exercise like this, is that, there's been much change, but no transformation. And the change has been installing a black face in a white position, a white systemic position that white fellas haven't been able to cope with and as a result of that, it's been about accommodation rather than transformation. I think that until white people in this country wake up. That is, they have an emotive and physic change in shift. We are always having to be bringing Indigenous peoples in and you can sit 10 black fellas at a table, but, if the white fella has the power, nothing's going to change.

Richard Young: Thank you, Lillian. Some of the responses and I know in terms of consultation negotiation that is going to be covered later on. In terms of where does the power and the control lie, one of the things in the collaborative model that I do talk about, is that very question. You can have a lot of collaborative approaches, multi-lateral agreements and stuff, but the vested control is in the government and in this collaborative model, what I say is in terms of if you want equal ownership, or if you want ownership, it has to be Aboriginal controlled and managed.

Commissioner Williams: I'm from the Sydney zone and a couple of things I'd like to mention, is the processes of where - it's already been talked about in New South Wales - but, one of the main processes there that we use is going through our state committee involving key players, like, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and people from local government, involving them in the processes that we go through and I think that plays an important role.

Also from a commissioner's point of view, I like the impact that the Board is having on people out there in the community by rotating their meetings around the country and allowing input from all over Australia. We've done that. This component of this Board made that decision to do that prior - from the beginning of the term. I think that's a good way to go.

But, I'm not one for accepting a lot of change and for a long time, we've had non-indigenous people write policy for us, and they always get it wrong. This way now, with the new restructure of ATSIC, we have indigenous people writing and involving themselves in the written policies for us. Policies that are going to meet our needs. Because at long last, we're going to be able to have our people write about what's good for us, not other people telling us what's good for us, because we've been there and done that so many times that it's just never done correctly. I want to applaud Pat for her speech this morning and yourself. It's a hard act to follow and you're doing very well so far. So, thank you.

Richard Young: Thank you. In terms of some of the fellas, what some of the fellas were saying in Adelaide when I had a yarn with them. One of the things that did come up was, as policy writers and stuff, you need to actually visit the

community. One of the things that was mentioned was, a lot of fellas write policy in a vacuum: they don't even go out and sit down with communities.

And one of the things that Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council have done is work with the policy unit in the state office and made sure that they attended their regional council meetings at each community. At the time it was shared with me that some of the former managers - I don't know if I'm speaking out of school here with ATSIC - but some of them hadn't actually been to a community and yet, they were writing policy about them. And that was a common thing that came up and I think it's just been raised as well.

Other things that were said were speak to the right people. Sometimes you can go to a community and just speak to the non-Indigenous CEO and forget to talk to the Aboriginal chairperson and the boards of management, which has happened. "Don't worry about the dogs, they won't bite you." And as those communities know, sometimes you see fellas and they panic about whether the dogs are going to bite, but I guess that was a bit of humour, because some fellas do, don't they?

Don't get caught up on credentialism - that was a word. We tend to look at the letters behind a person's name and give them value and think that they're all knowing. Yet, as you know, if you've worked in remote communities, or worked with Aboriginal people, they won't say, "Well, look, this is my title." Yet, they could have pearls of wisdom that you'll miss out on.

So, don't get caught up on that. Learn more about kinship, cultural obligations and systems, relax, take your time and don't rush in and out of the community. Spend time there. Get to know the people who you're writing policy about it's going to effect. Don't tell us what you think, or push your ideas on us. Listen to what we think and listen to our ideas, acknowledge community protocols. You don't always know if you're talking to the right fellow, you should always find that out. Diverse views should be encouraged and one of the things that came out of that point was, that sometimes councils, or board, may only want you to speak to them and community fellas say, "Well, hang on, what about us? Don't always go to them, we may have different views to them."

Depending on the issue, it's also important to engage at a level of skills and knowledge and experience to provide you with the appropriate information, was also shared. And that part of the process which has been shared as well, is having forums where you involve the wide consultation, be more specific with fellas who have got the expertise in specific areas and the establishment of advisory groups. One of the things that happened in Adelaide last year, was the establishment of a coalition to look at putting up policy priorities for the incoming state government, which again, was organised by the Commission. And also be aware of the gatekeepers who control the flow of information in and out of the community. Which was another point that was raised and don't use bureaucratic language as it can be insulting and disrespectful, use it wisely.

Part of what I've been asked to talk about also is, how do we maintain mutually respectful working relationships with Aboriginal people? How do we go about doing that? And some of those things have been raised already by

acknowledging bodies that have been established, such as regional councils. Being honest about your lack of knowledge in relation to community issues.

It is okay not to be all knowing and to say to community fellas, that you're not sure what all the issues are. Humbling yourself and saying, "Well, look I need to learn from you as community people, rather than thinking you need to know all the answers, was another point that was raised. Don't develop the policy, go to the community and expect them to endorse it. We had a situation last year where there was an inner city framework for homelessness, the department called a community forum, had already developed the strategies and then asked us to see if we endorsed it. Does that sound familiar as a process? Why do we do that? Why do fellas do that?"

Mr: Because they know everything.

Richard Young: Yes, they know everything. Yeah, I forgot. But, if we're looking at maintaining mutual respectful working relationships, I guess you've got to respect the people that you're working with and those sort of attitudes and those approaches, obviously, they show no respect and they got the treatment they deserved. They actually had to go back and re-word the strategies to include the views of Aboriginal people and they also were disciplined in one sense in terms of their internal processes. Because in this day and age to just continually do that, does nothing for reconciliation which that department has a statement of reconciliation about.

What I'd planned to do and I know I've only got 10 minutes left, is talk a little bit about some current examples that are happening in South Australia and then basically talk a little bit about the framework that I've used with mainstream organisations and then just open it up to the floor to just share whatever you feel is on your heart in terms of where we can go from here on.

With Aboriginal service division, it's a unit within the Department of Human Services. They are responsible for funding coordination management of Aboriginal services within DHS, or Department of Human Services, and they're responsible for setting standards, about how these services are provided and monitor the delivery of the services to see that they achieve these standards.

Within this framework, they've initiated the development of the Egawata* principles. And they're basically about - the Egawata principles focus on renal health needs of Aboriginal people and these were developed over time and not overnight. They involved a series of meetings that involved key stakeholders, such as the traditional owners of the Egawata homelands; identify community health workers; community individuals; organisations; government departments and medical professionals.

They slept overnight for a couple of days, as I understand it, and part of the process was educating them culturally and was doing it in their Aboriginal time, not normally the way that a lot of the medical professions would have been used to. They had to actually experience the process to be committed to the progress of implementing the strategies and the principles identified in the Egawata principles.

To ensure that medical professional and service providers would implement these principles, they've attached those principles to their service agreement and made that a condition of funding. And when they apply for funding in this area, they've got to address the six principles which include that the project must be sustainable. It must have a pro-active and preventative approach; it must address the environmental determinants of health, such as food and water. It must have an Aboriginal community and family approach. It must incorporate that. It must respect Aboriginal time and space and address the need for coordination and continuity between the regions and Adelaide. That's one quick example.

I've been working with a state-wide community-based organisation known as South Australian Sport and Recreation Association. Back in December 2000, SASRA, they've undertaken a process of organisation change and development and just because they're an Aboriginal organisation, it doesn't mean that they always follow protocols either, or Aboriginal organisations always follow protocols. But, there's a lot of organisations I've worked with, -SASRA to me, have stood out. There was an issue before 2000 where there was concern about their service delivery to the community. There was concern that they weren't reflecting the needs of their state-wide member group. They decided at the board level, to undertake a state-wide community consultation process.

For three months the CEO and the project officer drove 20,000 kilometres and visited every community. They sat down and they had a yarn with the fellas. They didn't rush in, rush out, they sat down, they first sent out a discussion paper about some of the issues and any other points that the community wanted to raise. I spoke about them. I got the feedback and then they held a state-wide conference to talk about the issues and the concerns and at one stage the concern was the need for SASRA to exist. Rather than baulk at the issue, they put it to a vote. "If you fellas want us to be your representative body, you vote on it? If you vote us out, then that's the decision. If you don't want to, if you want to keep us in, if we need to improve our services and programs, let's have a yarn about that?" So, because they're a funded organisation by ATSIC - they held a state-wide conference which Commissioner Butler was at.

From there, out of that conference, the outcomes were identified. The board met two months later to develop strategic directions in line with the conference outcomes and part of the issues was, equal representation on the board of management. Which means constitutional change. From there, another discussion paper has been developed and as I understand it, the CEO and project officer are undertaking consultations again and a special general meeting is going to be held to look at a new governance model. Through that process, the board of management themselves have been going through capacity building in terms of their own strategic planning.

Again, we know so much as Aboriginal people, we understand political process; we understand strategic planning; we understand the needs of our people. Yet today, we are still unrecognised in terms of qualifications in the

eyes of the mainstream. Yet, working with Telstra and a lot of mainstream companies in terms of developing coaching programs, I'm amazed how much the gap is in terms of experience and expertise for Aboriginal people up here and a lot of non-Aboriginal people that are down there. Yet, we're viewed as the other way around.

In terms of SASRA as a community-based organisation, the process is now in its 15th month. In terms of consistency and stickability, the board and themselves put themselves in a situation where they said, "Okay, we'll put everything on the line. We'll look at the government structure, we may not get voted in or out." But, their commitment to the cause of the community-base - to the needs of the community, have always been at the forefront. I know that that may sound a bit wishy-washy, but, in terms of applying it to yourself and where you sit now, have you put yourself in that position, to say, "Well, look, I can easily get voted out as a community-based organisation and a new restructure or whatever." But, they have shown me and I've been involved with that organisation, that they're an example of complete respect for community management as a cornerstone for serving community needs.

I am sure that there are many other Aboriginal community-based organisations out there and it would be good for us to show case models of management. In terms of the ANTA recognition of prior learning, a pilot that I'm involved in, one of the things in the reviews and the reports that they talk about is, that Aboriginal people never seem to get past certificate three level in qualifications.

One of the things that we've looked at in terms of this pilot, is I had a look at the ATSIC reporting systems, the regulated processes that they use for organisations to develop their applications for funding. I matched that against the certificate four in frontline management initiatives and looked at the performance criteria that they require there in terms of achieving that qualification. I interpreted the standards, matched that to the ATSIC system and we're discussing at the reference group whether we're able to use the system that governs Aboriginal community-based organisations as a benchmark for recognition of prior learning.

What does that mean? It means that there's an opportunity for recognition of a lot of our community-based managers to go through that process of recognition, the prior learning, and receive accreditation at the certificate four, or diplomat level in management, and be given the due respect of the amount of work that they have to do on community, with the complex issues that they have to deal with on community, as well as looking at the range of different funding bodies that they have to deal with on community. It's not an easy job and I'm not telling you fellas anything you don't know. But, I think, what Lillian said, Lillian sort of started me out in South Australia at Towndie Community College and gave me an opportunity to be involved there and again, I thank you Lillian.

In coming here today, like you were saying, Commissioner Williamson, I believe Aboriginal people should be writing policy for Aboriginal people. I believe that our ancestors have been able to manage this country long before

Captain Cook and them came along and I believe we'd be able to manage this country now, even with the multicultural community that we have. I think we'd be more in tune with the multicultural country and be able to provide policy development for those who are disadvantaged better than those who've never been disadvantaged.

In terms of concluding, the above vision of my great grandfather, Chadrack, with the dawning of a new day, as with that of many Indigenous people at the time and prior, can be aligned to that of Moses, who himself, never got to set foot on the promised land. Perhaps history will show us in time as to what we will do in this political landscape. When engaging Indigenous people in the policy development process, there are fundamental principles.

I apologise I didn't get to the collaborative framework. But, I understand in terms of the paper, you'll be able to access it on the net. Don't pick up on my spelling mistakes. But, I do hope that and I apologise that I haven't got you more involved, but, I'd be happy to share, if there's opportunities later on, to talk more about it. But, my only hope is, that I've contributed in some way for us as a mob, to achieve the dawning of a new day.

Thank you.