

Lionel E D Bamblett



13 September 2024

RE: Submission to the Yoorook Justice Commission

My name is Lionel Edward Dixon Bamblett, and I am a proud Wiradjuri, Dja Dja Wurung and Yorta Yorta man. I am writing to express my serious concerns regarding the ongoing cultural disconnection and the loss of family cultural knowledge experienced by my people.

I am a genealogist specialising in Aboriginal family histories with over fifteen years' experience. I am currently employed at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, as Lead Aboriginal genealogist. Prior to that I worked at the Koorie Heritage Trust as a researcher, working with Stolen Generation members.

In my experience, there are several important issues that must be tackled when it comes to researching Aboriginal family history.

Documents and access

For us to conduct research, we must utilise state services and often apply for documents which takes a fair amount of time. We often pay for certificates or ask for access to records that are held in state departments. There are times when documents are not readily available due to a variety of reasons, they may not be uploaded onto systems yet etc. This presents a gap in research for us and for our families.

Historical past practices

Historical issues, we know that records were destroyed, and this was a common practice, so we must work through fragmented documents to build a family tree for families. This takes time, for the most part over a 12-month period, which does not align with reporting requirements and systems that want immediate results.

Child Protection processes

For over a decade and a half, I have meticulously researched and documented the lineages of numerous Aboriginal families throughout Australia, with a primary focus on Victoria/NSW. Through this extensive work, I have encountered a troubling trend:

children are increasingly receiving incorrect cultural information. The core issue stems from a lack of accurate, culturally sensitive practices in the self-identification processes across systems. This could be due to any number of factors, intake just clicking a box to say that a child identifies as Aboriginal. Case managers not knowing enough about the family to ascertain their connections, or families giving incorrect information because they do not know themselves where their connections are.

From a research perspective, in the beginning phases of research, it is crucial to have information pertaining to three generations to conduct family history research. At times families will say their Aboriginal connection is to one family line, but when we research this, we find no connection. The issue is becoming all too commonplace.

The consequences of such inaccuracies are severe. Children who are misinformed about their cultural background face a loss of connection to their ancestral heritage, which is vital for their personal identity and community belonging. This disruption can lead to feelings of alienation and confusion, exacerbating the loss of cultural continuity and undermining efforts to preserve Aboriginal heritage. There have been children who have grown up for many years believing they are Aboriginal, to then find out that they are not.

They have used Aboriginal services, have made lifelong connections with Aboriginal communities, attended events, sporting activities and have developed a deep belief system in which they connect to. To then find out through our research, that they are not Aboriginal, it becomes yet another source of trauma and rejection for them. This does not sit well with me as an Aboriginal man, or experienced researcher. The ethical considerations need to be discussed at a higher level.

I send this submission in the hopes that Aboriginal family history is discussed, the research processes, and under-resourcing that we have in this area.

Recommendations

- **Collaboration with Genealogists and Cultural Experts**
- **Access to state documents and libraries**
- **Culturally Sensitive Self-Identification Processes**
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation**

The loss of cultural knowledge and the disconnection from ancestral heritage are critical issues that demand immediate and effective action. The department's current processes have unintentionally contributed to these problems, and it is imperative that reforms are made to rectify this situation. By adopting culturally sensitive practices, enhancing training, and collaborating with experts, we can better support Aboriginal children and families in maintaining their cultural integrity and heritage.

Thank you for considering this submission. I am available for further discussion and would be pleased to provide additional insights or assistance in addressing these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Lionel E Bamblett
Aboriginal Family History Genealogist