

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From: Martin James McKowen****Dated: 27 September 2024****Submission:**

My submission is not as a First Nations person but as a non-Indigenous person subject to a system that developed people that were able to commit injustices. I am a 62-year-old man with ancestors from Scotland and Ireland. My family came to this land in 1853 as non-convict settlers. Being born in 1961 and attending primary school in the 1960s during the time of the 1967 referendum we received little or no information about the history of colonisation in Australia and what we did receive was incorrect or total rubbish. The understanding from the education system was that Aboriginal peoples (aborigines as termed at the time) were from a time past and that Aboriginal peoples had assimilated into the Australian populace. We were taught that Australia is a benevolent nation, and a "fair go" is afforded to all peoples. We were also taught that Australia was the second country to have universal suffrage. This was made worse as my family spent time on a farm in the Riverina area of NSW near a town called Moulamein.

On the farm was the "old mission" that served as a place to meet people in the bush. "Meet you at the old mission at 12 and we will light a fire and have lunch!". Also, occasionally we would come across old ovens while preparing the fields for crops. I am now embarrassed and disgusted to say that these ovens were ploughed over (and sometimes picked over) to prepare the ground for the crop. The belief was that they were a remnant of the past with no relevance to now. If the education system was better, I would understand what the mission represented and what went on there, I would also understand the meaning of the oven. I might have even been curious about the Traditional Owners of the land, their language, their history, their lives, their lore, and the meaning of place on the farm and near to where I grew up in Melbourne. However, this was not the case.

During my working life I spent time working near Katherine NT and saw some of the life of Aboriginal people there, however, most of what I saw was the consequences of dispossession by people who had been evicted from their communities. In 2018 I was tasked to go to Gapuwiyak in the NT for a fact finding and training project on behalf of my employer. It was there where English is a second, or third, or fourth language, where jobs are few and far between, where the economy is totally dependent on the government, where I was a foreigner in my own country, where I could sit down on country and yarn with other elders that I knew that I had been deceived. That my education and life until that time was a lie. That what I thought I knew and believed about First Nations peoples on this land the dominant call Australia was wrong.

Unfortunately, this is not just my story, this is the story of the majority of non-Indigenous Australians - settlers. The response to the Voice is indicative of this ignorance about the Australian Constitution, the history of Australia, the current situation for First Nations peoples, and ignorance of the agreements and promises that have been made - including those contained within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

People also believe that Australia was the second country to have universal suffrage despite Aboriginal women in Queensland not having the right to vote until 1965. As a result, I embarked on a mission of educating myself, I attended university to complete a Graduate Certificate of Aboriginal Engagement, and now completing a Masters of Aboriginal Studies. None of this would have been necessary had the education at the primary school level

included facts of history, ways of living and seeing the world for Aboriginal peoples been taught. As I said at the beginning, this is not about system discrimination towards me, but it is about the conditions that develop non-Indigenous peoples to believe certain things that results in them believing that the position of Indigenous peoples within Australia is as part of the assimilated masses. For them to see it otherwise requires education, exposure, and change in the discourse. Thank you for accepting this submission.

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