

Yoorrook Justice Commission
Statement of Uncle Henry Atkinson

My name is Henry Atkinson. I'm from Echuca. I was born in Echuca, and I'm a Wolithiga person, that's my tribal peoples names. Wolithiga means water people - that goes with the area where I come from. Because there's is four rivers up there, or three rivers. And so that's what my people's tribal name means, is, Wolithiga meaning water people.

My father was born in 1891. Dad was born in the bush, with his mum they had to be transported to Cummeragunja to the midwife up there. So, his birth certificate has got Cummeragunja on it, but he was actually born in in the bush, near the near the lakes.

My mother was born I guess around 1928. My grandfather on my mum's side, they were at Cummeragunja. Mum was taken to Cummeragunja when she was about 8 years old. She came back when she was about 16. She wasn't allowed to marry until she was 20. But she was only young then. I don't know how they got up to Warangesda. But in those times, they swapped people from place to place, just like Cummeragunja. They had people on there that were from Queensland, South Australia and Victoria in different places.

I want to talk about Cummeragunja mission on the New South Wales and Victorian border. It was set up by the state government in the early days round about the 1928s, after another mission that was set up by a person after Daniel Matthews had set up, Maloga, just not too far away from Cummeragunja. And he did that out of his own pocket until he went broke. And before he went broke, he applied to the government to give some funding to help Aboriginal people. Daniels could see something was happening to our people. This was before Cummeragunja being recognised as a place for Aboriginal people, for safety and the likes. But I'll come back to Cummeragunja when I've finished with Maloga.

In those times, you know, there was plagues and the likes taking place. And a lot of our people, certainly at Maloga, you know, died from the Black Plague. And I know that's ironical that they called it the Black Plague, and its Aboriginal people dying. And yet Daniel spent a lot of his money on helping your people. But yet the government of the time did nothing until it was too late.

Then the people from Maloga just dispersed. They couldn't go into the town because of the racism that was taking place. The only place they could get any benefit, I suppose, was living off the mission, or living off the tip and scrounging around the best they could. You've got to remember that during colonisation took place, there was fences to fence - properties were fenced up, barbed wire. To stop their animals from roaming around. So, our people needed stuff to eat, so what did they do? They'd go and kill a lamb or a sheep or something to survive. So, then the government decided to act, to put up another mission, which was Cummeragunja. And that was fine.

That was going along great until the mission managers changed hands. Like I said, you know, the people were doing the work on the mission without being paid. Doing the killing of cattle and growing their own foods, until things went wrong, where the maybe the mission manager got a bit hungry for money himself. He started doing the

wrong thing by the Aboriginal people. And that's when you hear of the walk off of Cummeragunja, and that was partly the cause of that. The people were being treated bad - real bad.

So, what happened, the residents of the mission decide to walk off. And that was the time when you're supposed to have a dog tag around your neck if you left the mission, and the dog tag was a piece of paper that was allowing you to be off Cummeragunja, and you had to return at a certain time. So that's, that's the reason why, one of the reasons why people walked off Cummeragunja. We call it dog tag because, you know, dogs have to have a tag. So, we referred to it as dog tag, but you had to have a piece of paper to allow you to go off the mission. Now, if you didn't return at whatever the stated time was on it, I still call it dog tag, that you could be incarcerated in the mission in a jail there. Or maybe not given rations or whatever. So, you'd be punished in some form.

That was treatment of those people, residents of the mission at that time. So they're the sort of things that happened. And for my family, my parents, they actually walked off the mission well before the big walk off. And they got as far as Mathoura. You know we're about halfway in between Echuca and say, Deni. And so, the landowners and the police up there turned them back. And you've got to remember that the roads in those times weren't like they are today.

But my parents didn't travel on the highway. They travelled along the river roads up to Mathoura. They had to go through Mathoura because the river road sort of ended there, you know, because then it comes into the Edwards River. So, they come onto the say the main road, and to go up to, to Deniliquin. But they couldn't get past Mathoura. They were forced with firearms to go back to Cummeragunja.

And so, they decided to go back towards Cummeragunja along the river road. But they actually diverted and then still followed the river road to Moama. And they lived in there for a couple of days, and then decide to come in to Echuca. So there the sort of things that happen. And so, you know, then coming into Echuca, well, you know there wasn't housing available naturally. In fact, for any, any Aboriginal person, they had to find their own accommodation wherever they ended up in.

But my parents, they stopped in Warren Street and put up a big tent underneath a great big tree that's no longer there. It's chopped down to make way for a new Echuca Moama Bridge. So, they stayed there in a tent for a while with all the kids. And then dad tried to find accommodation, a house, something or to live in. So, we did live in a couple of houses in Echuca until dad bought a house and next to the railway line in Echuca and he bought the house but the land, pardon me, that had a 99-year lease because it was owned by the railways.

I don't know what happened to the lease. By rights that land would still be under my father's name. But there's already buildings put on that property now. So, the house was sold to one of my uncles, and he demolished the house. And for the timber that was in it, and the tin roof and everything. So, dad had passed away by then, just before then, and that's why mum let the house go. And she moved into a commission house at the time, too.

One of my brothers, he had one family, and the type of housing that they were living in, it wasn't good enough for the whitefellas. One of them, was living in the flats over in Mooroopna. Well, those flats were created after the walk off from Cummeragunja, because a lot of people from Cummeragunja went to the flats. And they had to erect their own accommodation with whatever materials they had, mainly tin, and cut from say square, big, four-gallon tins and stuff and then flattened out to make a roof or walls.

Anyways so the authorities came along after a certain time and took those children. Then later on, virtually the same thing happened again, this time in Echuca. Near the junction of the Campaspe and Murray River. And the kids were taken away again. And this time I think it was five kids that were taken away. Some of the kids have passed away now. But the mother and the father, they've passed away, and they never, ever got around to seeing, seeing their children again.

One time I was in Ballarat, and I was walking up the, you know, I was there with a fire brigade, and I was walking up one of these streets and I came across this guy that was sitting on a seat there. 'Mate, what are you doing here?'. It was my brother. He said, 'oh, I'm trying to get in to see if I can see the kids'. That's in Ballarat. And they wouldn't let them in. But the authorities at that time told the kids that were in that home that they'd died. The mother and father had passed away. I just hope it doesn't happen today. But what I'm saying is in those times we weren't really recognised as people, and we didn't have any rights of any kind. We still, you know, we still haven't the rights that we should have, really.

I often wonder or think about my elders. How they must have been treated to survive, and they had to survive and put up with the harsh treatments that were put out to my people. Not just to my people, but all Aboriginal people here in Australia, which includes Tasmania and the Torres Strait Islands. And they have survived through the harshest times. Now, when you think about being hunted off your land. And fences being put up to incarcerate our people, which we now call missions. How they survived, and you've got to remember, those times we didn't have handouts or endowments or pensions or anything. But they, those elders survived.

I suppose if it wasn't for those elders, we wouldn't be here today. And there were times were there ain't no proper care about those ancestors, that had to survive. And the treatment that they had to put up with, especially when living on those missions. They had to grow and kill their own foods, for the white fellas, the mission managers. They didn't get any payments for them, and those payments were supposed to go to them. That's what we call the stolen wages, when they had to kill animals for survival, grow their own vegetables.

That money that was supposed to be paid to those elders but were being paid by police officers in those times, and the mission managers. Which I take it, you know, in my thoughts that those monies then become the property of the governments. So, in my opinion, once again, that's reparation for us as people today, for the younger generations to be able to survive.

The other thing I want to talk about is, you know, I've been involved for a long time on the return of ancestral remains from certainly different parts of Australia, but more

importantly, those remains that are in museums worldwide. And when you've been involved in that sort of place, you see, and you hear and read a lot of things that should not have taken place. Now, I've been in a situation where you go to a place to bring back some of your people, and you see the remains, maybe the full skeletal remains, or maybe just the head of a person, and that really gets to you when you see just the head and the skull cap missing.

And the ones that I've seen are mainly of, say, 20 year old females, and you wonder why that you can only see that part of the skeletal remain, but you don't see any other body part, except that the skull and the skull has got the head cap missing, and then later on you come across it - where you'll see a brain of a 20 year old. In this glass container, and that that brain is cut in half, and where we were taking that brain, where we were we were collecting that brain from, expected us to look after that brain of some female. But we refused to do that.

And the employees of that place where we were, they took it on themselves to do the right thing and take the brain out of this glass container and the fluid that the brain was in. So, then the next thing we said, 'well, we want that brain stitched up together as if it hadn't been touched'. So, they expected us to take two halves of the brain, but we refused, and gradually the place decided that they would do the right thing, and have it suitable to be able to bring that remains of that female back home. And that wasn't the only one that this - there was hundreds that we brought back. Not in the same condition that I'm talking about now, but you see so many things. So many things.

The reason why I got involved in the ancestral remains is in the early days, probably when I was around about 4 or 5 years old, going through the bush in a gig, horse and gig with my dad. He pulled up at a certain place to give the horses a drink. And he said, 'don't go over there, you can't go over there'. And I said, 'why'? He said 'no, special place, you can't go over there'. But on the next trip through the bush. We go pull up at the same place. And what were there was a burial place. When we got there, there was there was nothing, nothing left there. It was all been disturbed and the skeletal remains had been removed.

So, you know our practices ought to be able to put our ancestors back. Back to rest - and not really available to what I see is, for any Indigenous group, certainly in Victoria, to have a special place put aside for those ancestors to call home. So that's the sort of thing that happened in the early days, and it still happens today in the sense that skeletal remains are being disturbed and you know, ended up being in a museum.

And of course, then they become unprovenanced because nobody knows who they are, or where they really, really come from. So sometimes you think of bad magic and bad things happening. Well for us it's still there. So, they're the sort of things that really get to me is - maybe with the truth telling, maybe an outcome might come that certainly traditional owners here in Victoria, and it should happen in right across Australia, that traditional owners have a special place to put their ancestors, their ancestors, back to country. Not in a cemetery or anything like that. So, it really gets me, and I've been involved in this for a long, long time, certainly with the museum here in Victoria, but also on a wider scale with the Commonwealth government on that sort of thing.

And now I want to talk about education. For me, growing up in Echuca, for instance, and the education side of it for Aboriginal kids - I hope it's changed a lot to what it was when I was going to school. Because I don't think in Victoria they had any policy for Aboriginal people, for kids. And you know, the cultural side and language side wasn't even thought about. Well, I take it the Victorian government because of, you know, the reason why I'm saying that it's probably not too far apart when, you know, the colonies came together. And so going to school for me, when it was my time to go to school, I go into this classroom and look around the room, and there's all black kids. A lot of them were my relations, which I didn't mind. It just seems strange how come we're all together. But then after a while, you start realising, well, you know this is segregation.

And even the segregation even got worse because we weren't allowed to have playtime at the same time as the other kids, or lunch time. Was all, you know, all segregated and the worst part about it is we weren't really encouraged to be good at school. And that segregation as far as sports, we weren't allowed to play sport. If another school was competing against one another, you weren't allowed to compete. You weren't allowed to try and get into a team and the likes. And you weren't allowed to really exceed educational wise. You're always kept down, and you really didn't get any grading of any kind. And then you're studying at that same old classroom, being taught a lot about Captain Cook and what he did and all that sort of stuff. But one thing I clearly remember, and like I said, we were mainly all related. And you start speaking a couple of language - Aboriginal words. And anyways, hey, didn't I tell you, you weren't allowed to speak any language. 'You speak English. Got to speak - don't let me hear you speak' - But after a while it naturally - if somebody speaks, then you're going to respond back. And anyways, next minute, up the front, great big old leather strap. 'One, two, three' on each hand, or across the knuckles with something. So that's the sort of thing that used to happen.

And now we're trying to get languages back. But the trouble is up my way there's no real language for this - the language is there, but they're to be taught, because there's so many languages now. And you know, some traditional owners would get upset if they'd be saying well, 'that's not our language'. You've got to teach this language or that language, and that's the way it is because there's not, say, a national Aboriginal language. How are we going to rectify that? And, you know, the young ones really want to know. And as we go along, there's not too many elders left. The worst part about that is that the elders not being left, but also some of the young ones there, what's happening here? It's that, you know, the young ones are taking their own lives. And if you can't rectify that, we're back to zero. So that's the thing that's got to be rectified. And that's why I was saying to you, as far as the young fella goes, if he gets a chance, take it, take it.

I also wanted to talk about how growing up there were truant officers. The truant officers would come around and go to your parent's place and make threats. And if you don't turn up to school, you're going to lose your kids. I grew up and accused of not going to school by a truant officer that I knew. He used to be a radio football broadcaster in Bendigo. But I think he had me mixed up with somebody else, and I think he realised that. But that's the sort of thing that used to happen to our people. And you've got to remember, that for our people, we didn't have benefits. if you're living in poverty, what are they going to expect? The young kids would not want to go to school anyways, and to be treated like they are at school, because there was racism

at school. And you're going to cop that well, and if you get it, you know, Aboriginal people will always want to defend themselves physically. And then if they're abused again because they're standing up for their own rights, you wouldn't want to keep going to school like that, you know. And naturally they, some of them wouldn't go to school. And that's, and I know some of them were sent away.

So, there was always that racism and segregation. The segregation still happens in here in Australia as far as Aboriginal people go. You know, I'm not saying every white person is a bad person because there are some really, really good, good people that really care. But they're the sort of things that happened, and some of them still happen. And no matter how much, you know, you try and try and change that. Like there are a certain amount of people that will be discriminative. They might think, they might say that they're not, but you know, just even in their speech and body language and everything, it tells you different. So, they're the sort of people you can be aware of. But when people come out straight out, they're the ones you've got to be really aware of. And sometimes when I come out, it's straight out. You know what you're going to expect and put your defences up. So that's the sort of thing that really happens.

On another note, I have been involved in the CFA. I joined when I was 16, but I used to go down to the fire station probably, probably when I was 15 years old, I suppose. I had a couple of friends who were in the CFA and they asked me to join up and because I played a lot of sport, and there was competition that the brigades have amongst themselves, in those different states and competition. I am I suppose still the champion fireman in Western Australia and Victoria.

But to go back to the education side of things, the education side wasn't really there. It was there, but it wasn't given to Aboriginal people. And I suppose in for me it was, I'm one of those persons. And yeah look, when you became the age of 14, at those times you could leave school. There was no encouragement or anything. But I decided to stay at school until Christmas. I turned 14 in August, and I waited until Christmas to leave school. And then after that, I - the school holidays had finished. I had applied to get a job. And I got a job at the age of 14 and worked for an organisation for about 16 years.

Then I got married when I was just over 21 and then had one child and that's Coleen, my eldest daughter. And I decided, the job I've got is okay, but it wasn't what I was looking for. And so I decided to move down to Melbourne. And I moved down to Melbourne in 1968. And got a job with General Electrics, and I became a manager of General Electrics, the biggest company in the world at that time. And I had a staff of 25 on the floor and there's seven office staff. And at that time, computers were just coming in. And so eventually the General Electrics decided to build a great big warehouse. And in that warehouse, I, like I said, with computers. So, they bought machinery that, was new to Australia and high-rise storage and the like. I was responsible for that, and about four other away from the premises storage areas. I was responsible to customs as far as goods coming into Australia from Japan or wherever. The Americans, they really treated you well. And while I was involved in that they send some of their staff around to the university to get extra training and the likes, and which they did. And they sent me to Monash, and that was going great. But even I copped a bit of a racism there.

One of the lecturers was saying, 'well, you can't teach Aboriginal people things, right?'. And I argued with them. That didn't worry me because I put up with a lot of rubbish well before that, and so General Electrics was closing down a lot of places in New Zealand, Japan and Canada, and here in Australia. So, the university heard and they said, 'oh, you'd better send him around here and we'll have a word with him'. So they took me on and I lectured and taught at Monash. And they then offered a professorial to us. If you can get to that, you get that title in front of your name that, just those few words, that'll open doors for you. It really does. But I don't want it to be looked upon as, you know, I don't want my people thinking that I'm trying to, be one step above. I'm not that type of person. It took me about 10 years to get to that.

I retired from Monash. I don't know when I retired from Monash, but when I retired, one of my colleagues that was with me at Monash, he went to, went to Deakin. And he heard I was leaving, so he said, 'oh, you better come over, I need your help'. Even though what he had for me was what I was doing exactly at Monash, it was teaching and lecturing, but also taking pre-service teachers up to the Northern Territory so they get some experience about - because what I was trying to achieve was being able to get students - Aboriginal students, to take on teaching. I got a couple through at Monash but then retired from there. And as far as I know at Monash, the unit is still going, because I had to create a 12 week compulsory unit. That took a lot of hard work. But even Monash acknowledges, and one of my daughters, she was going to Monash, so she took on education. She eventually came and taught with me. That was great. She has a double degree teacher, with her masters. She works with the education department in Victoria.

Then I went to Deakin, and we take students up to Maningrida or around Katherine area different places, and real remote places for the students. But with the Covid coming in, it sort of put a dampener on it. Now they're trying and Deakin is in touch with us. They want me to try and help to get it back up and running again. But funds are the thing because, I don't believe in students should have to pay, because it costs a few dollars to go up there. The accommodation and the likes and some of the skills are pretty good. But it's getting them up there. And so, I don't know how we're going at the moment getting those funds. So, and what I was going to say, Monash acknowledges what I'd done in the sense and there's a scholarship for Aboriginal kids.

What I'm getting at is here is that you can achieve it if you put your mind to it. And, you know, I've probably learned more by not going to school, I can tell you that. You know, if you're talking, you know, arithmetic and all that sort of stuff. That's nothing to me. Because I've had to come up with ideas when - as far as General Electrics setting up new warehouses and doing, you know, to do things. I'm a bit smarter than what people were doing so it's about inventing ideas, I suppose. So, what I was doing at Monash was humanities. And just through that, you get to learn about people, how they think. The other side of it you may not have gone through the school of adding up and dividing and doing all that sort of thing. To me, that's nothing, you know, I can count and all that. So, they're the sort of things that, you know - Aboriginal people aren't dumb, you know, you don't have to be taught the English way of doing things. There is our way of doing things too, that are just as smart. And that's what some of the younger ones I've been teaching are finding out, that you can be just as smart as what I'm telling you. And listen, because, you know, our people had to do that to be smart. And we are

smart because you only have to look at things - they're just starting to discover now that, you know, as far as our science goes, and how the world works.

And until you start showing how smart we were. And then they start listening and wanting to do. For the ones that go up to the Northern Territory and, end up overseas, they'd go overseas and teach First Nations people over there in America and Canada. They make contact with you via phone and thank you and appreciate what you've done for them. So, they get the full understanding so that once they go up to the Northern Territory, they say to me, and I still bump into some of them now and again, they appreciate them being able to do what they're doing. Because they've said to me that, you know, when I get my qualifications, I'm going to go back up there. And they've only had six weeks to realise and say that. Anyway so come back, get your qualifications, and they go back and they're happy with what they're teaching, and what they've been taught about - you know, but there are ways that you can - what I'm saying, you might say, well how do you know how those Aboriginal people up in the Northern Territory carry on compared to being down here and telling them white fellas, but you've just got to tell them, give them a few tips. You know, what those people do know about you even before you open your mouth.

To me the door has been opened, but it still needs the government to really be involved in that. And what should happen is that every university should have something like - I know Melbourne has and Deakin has a little bit. Deakin has got a way to go, it won't be as good as Monash, but they're the things that if you can create something in all the universities, that things will change. Because there's some schoolteachers there now that are teaching, that have not got that knowledge, and they've got that mindset once again. And what I'd say is, if you can understand body language, and just listen to some words that some people say.

These days I'm still keeping busy. I've been having to think about it even today, when I was driving down, I had a phone call, and - so I'm still thinking about it, apart from, you know, trying to get Deakin back up on the road again. And because it is something that is good for student teachers to be able to hear from traditional owners on country, and see how the kids are up there. Even though it may, it's not a place where you really want to be. But if you're dedicated to teaching that they are good places to go, up there. Even though it still needs it here too. So, what I was trying to do was be able to make that happen. So no matter where these educators go, they could be anywhere across Victoria. But the teachers have got to have that cultural knowledge. Which there's still a lot of them haven't got that knowledge.

I've been a bit lucky. But I've been lucky to travel across a good part of Australia on ancestral remains. I have gotten to meet community and hear them explaining what their ideas were on their ancestors, the unprovenanced ones, the ones we don't know where they are, or who they are or where they come from. And so because there is going to be a special place built up in in Canberra, and that's what the communities wanted because that question was put to them. Where do you want them? They all came back, you know, after talking about Alice Springs or the Kimberley or, or different places. So, they and even having a keeping place in each state. But you wouldn't get the Commonwealth government paying for one in each state.

I think Department of Foreign Affairs sort of comes into it a bit now, and they've taken over a little bit from what we had in mind. So, there was a plan. A plan was already drawn up for keeping place. Not a resting place. I'm sorry - a resting place, not a keeping place. Because we don't want them to keep them. But we just don't want things to happen to those ancestors. Just straight off without trying to really do some research on them. So, we were looking at it like - the ones that if there's going to be research, well that research to be done by some Aboriginal peoples, you know more to get them, give them the knowledge and more work or whatever, and all that sort of thing. So, but at the moment something's gone astray, and the place that that was going to be, is no longer going to be there. It's going to come back closer to the museum up in Canberra. Because we said AIATSIS, we want AIATSIS to sort of manage the place, and we have Aboriginal people working there as managers.

Under AIATSIS and the likes, and doing it that way, and keeping a say in our way, an Aboriginal way. And they are putting up a new building, but I think they're going to move AIATSIS into it. And it's not what we suggested. We wanted to be a place where, you know, for our ancestors to be, but also for any of our people that go up to Canberra if they want to go and pay a visit and pay respects to the ancestors, that would be available to them and you know, the ceremony place and all that in one. So, all of that had been planned for. I think the plans had gone out astray. So, I keep an eye on that too.

So that's, that's how I sort of got involved in, in our ancestors because my brothers, you know, we'd be going through the bush and come across where ancestral remains had been disturbed, but they'd get the remains and rebury them. And being part of Museum Victoria well I, started them off a long time ago and returning ancestors. But then the Victorian government came up with the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, they've gone a bit slack. That because the remains are still at the museum and none of them are really moved. That's only because of the Victorian government hasn't got any money.

I've been over to United States and Canada is part of that, from what I've seen. But, you know, with Afro-Americans, where those people come from. As what, you know, the ones that are there at the top. Not Obama or that, but other people, you know, smart looking, well dressed, driving big flash cars, probably got good money, good jobs. The ones that I've seen, you know. I just hope that we can get like that. You know, we don't have to do the same things. But I'm pretty sure if we're given the chance, our people, our younger generations can be something.

But there's so many things that that are underneath that might miss out. That's what you know, you guys have got to be careful of is - you can talk about education, health and housing, certainly housing for me at the moment. I've spoken about this a long time ago, why isn't our housing available for our people? And why are we our people are still sleeping under bridges? Because they do. And that shouldn't be the case.

Some of them may not want to go into housing, but how do you overcome that? There must be a way that instead of somebody dying in the bush in a tent, and that has happened. That's no fantasy about that, but they're the sort of things that - there's so much that has to be taken into account of when you're talking about social justice and the likes, but you know, education yeah, for our young ones if - but it's when we're

talking about education, it's probably been pointed mainly at the white people educating them about us. We are people and we haven't got the rights that we should have, and that should be afforded it to us. And and not meaning anything, I don't try to be discriminative to other people that have come to our country, but they seem to be afforded more rights than what we have, really. And the other thing is, you know, with this plight, you know, I was looking at on the journey down here today, how far Melbourne is growing down that way. And how far those little towns are growing this way. How much land is going to be left for our people?

And as far as the ancestral remains, that each traditional owner group should have their own private land to put their ancestors to rest no matter where or what, where they come from. And we haven't got that. Yorta Yorta's was lucky enough, they've got a lot of place, but they're taking ancestors that really don't belong there if you know what I mean? They've taken ancient ancestors. They should be going back to where they belong. And so that's the sort of thing that the state government should really come good with when they're, talking about certain things. And that doesn't seem to happen.

And of course housing and that. Aboriginal people should be given the opportunity to buy a house, even if they rent it and say, well, here's a house, but you've got to rent when you've finished, when you've paid a certain amount, and it reaches what the price of that house would be, it's yours. And free water. Some of the things that are attached to a house, like water and electricity. Well, yeah, I can understand electricity, but water, that should come free to Aboriginal people. Because people are making money that we should be, have a share in. I don't know what it would be like up there now at, at Moonahcullah, but you know, the only water that was available was either from the Edwards River, was a fair way away. But there were all that bit of a swamp that was at the back.

But I really think, you know, sometimes the government might think that they're doing right in their minds. But really, if you did a survey for Aboriginal people, you'd probably see a different picture. And that's what the government doesn't see. And not just the Victorian government, but the Commonwealth government as well.

And to me, the Voice, I think people were led astray on that, and that's why it fell down, yeah. Because I reckon they went and spoke to, you know, had discussions with Aboriginal people - that was a bit of a lie.

I just hope by telling my story and my family story, I can give some information or past history of my people and the area that I live in, what my ancestors had to put up with, and what we still put up with it today. But most of all, I want to make sure that we can put some barriers in there that can be a safeguard for the younger generations. And certainly, you know, other Aboriginal peoples that are here in Victoria. But most important for me is looking after the younger generations, because if we don't, we won't have any of our people. We'll become extinct, just like what happens to all of our totems and moieties if we don't do this.

END OF STATEMENT