

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

From: Ron Hall and Dr Bev Hall

Dated: November 2024

Submission:

What do you know about the colonisation of Victoria and its impacts on First Peoples?

We were very involved in the Aborigines Advancement League in Victoria - Bellarine/Geelong group in 1960's. Ron Hall was secretary. We know very well the horrors that colonization inflicted on First Peoples. We looked after Tanderra a holiday hostel in Queenscliff for First Nations and made lasting friendships with Yorta Yorta and several other peoples. We fostered a Wonjabuluk Aboriginal girl from Ballarat orphanage and learnt later she was one of Stolen Generation. We remained lifelong friends. We were involved in the campaigns to improve the living conditions of the people at Rumbalara at the time where ten families lived in corrugated sheds sharing one tap it was disgusting forcing people to live in these conditions. The attempted forced removal of First Nations from Cummergunja. The massacre of First Nations at Mt Eccles where Bev grew up and learnt about other massacres in Gippsland and Western Victoria where our personal early forebears settled. Bev's grandfather taught her that if land owners said Aboriginal people always went on walkabout it meant that these land owners were ill treating the people. He found Aboriginal people good workers on his property. This knowledge and experiences influenced us to devote our lives to fighting racism and working to support First Nations languages and cultures.

What has been your experience learning about First Nations history and culture in Victoria's education system? Do you feel it was comprehensive?

In the 1950's and 1960's, when we grew up there was no acknowledgement of Aboriginal languages or culture only learning about the supposed "inferiority" of Aboriginal People. There was never any consideration of First Nations achievement. Campaigning later in the 1967 campaign in Geelong gave us hope of more possible enlightenment, but in 60 years we feel attitudes need a great deal more improvement in developing respect and understanding of the World's Oldest Continuous Culture. We all need this if there is any hope for humanity and education is the most effective way to go.

What changes would you like to see in Victoria to promote better understanding and respect for First People?

Encouraging and teaching First Nations languages and cultures and incorporating Indigenous history across all subjects. In BC Canada students are encouraged to find out who were the original peoples and to learn about their language/s and cultures in the areas where the schools are. If any descendants are still in the area students are encouraged to meet with them and learn about them from the Elders. This also applies to non-Indigenous.

In what ways do you think non-First Nations Victorians can contribute to the process of truth-telling and treaty?

Learning and acknowledging the shameful history of the colonizers both in the education system and in healing groups/yarning circles to rectify attitudes. Truth telling is extremely important if all peoples are to gain any healing. Then and only then can a country move forward with respect and understanding of its original peoples.

In what ways could First Peoples history and culture be promoted in Victoria?

As mentioned above through education in schools but also through positive images, learning about country in agriculture, encouraging people to visit cultural centres, as Pastor Doug said to us in 1962 that to extend a hand in friendship would make a world of difference. In TV, radio and throughout social media and the press displaying First Nations as fellow human beings who have a great deal to teach us and to value this knowledge in understanding this land we live in.

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