



**THE HON. MALCOLM TURNBULL MP
PRIME MINISTER**

TRANSCRIPT

Saturday, 5 August 2017

**Address at Garma 2017
Arnhem Land, NT**

E&OE...

PRIME MINISTER:

Ngarra buku-wurrpan bukmak nah! Nhuma'lanah.

Ngarra Prime Minister numalagu djal Ngarra yurru wanganharra'wu nhumalangu bukmak'gu marrigithirri.

Ngarra ga nhungu dharok ga manikay' ngali djaka wanga'wu yirralka.

I acknowledge and pay respect to your country, and your elders.

As Prime Minister, I'm here to talk to you and learn from you.

I acknowledge and respect your language, your song lines, your dances, your culture, your caring for country, and your estates.

I pay my respects to the Gumatj people and traditional owners past, present and future, on whose land we are gathered.

I also acknowledge other Yolngu people, First Peoples from across the country and balanda here today including Bill Shorten, Nigel Scullion and all other Parliamentary colleagues but above all I acknowledge our Parliamentary colleagues, Indigenous Parliamentary colleagues. Truly, voices of First Australians in the Parliament. Thank you for being here today and for the wisdom you give us, you together with my dear friend Ken, so much wisdom in the Parliament.

I offer my deep respect and gratitude to the Chairman of the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu for hosting Lucy and me with your family. It was lovely to camp here last night and the last music was beautiful, serene and like a lullaby sending us all off to our dreams. Thank you. Emily was the last singer – beautiful. And of course we woke here to the beautiful sounds of Gulkala.

I again as I did yesterday extend our deep condolences to the family of Dr G Yunupingu at this very sad time. He brought the Yolngu language to the people of Australia and his music will be with us forever.

I've come here to North East Arnhem Land to learn, participate respectfully and can I thank everyone so far I've had the chance to talk with. I am filled with optimism about our future together as a reconciled Australia.

Last month scientists and researchers revealed new evidence that our First Australians have been here in this land for 65,000 years.

These findings show that Indigenous people were living at the Madjedbebe rock shelter in Mirarr Country, at Kakadu east of Darwin, 18,000 years earlier than previously thought.

Among the middens, rock paintings, remains, plants and ochre, was the world's oldest-known ground-edge axe head.

These findings place Australia on centre stage in the story of human origin, including mankind's first long-distance maritime voyage - from Southeast Asia to the Australian continent.

Our First Peoples are shown as artistically, as technologically advanced, and at the cutting edge of technology in every respect.

Importantly, they confirm what Aboriginal people have always known and we have known - that your connection, your intimate connection to the land and sea are deep, abiding, ancient, and yet modern.

This news is a point of great pride for our nation. We rejoice in it, as we celebrate your Indigenous cultures and heritage as our culture and heritage - uniquely Australian.

As Galarrwuy said yesterday as he spoke in Yolngu, he said: "I am speaking in Australian." Sharing, what a generosity, what a love, what a bigness he showed there as he does throughout his life and his leadership.

I want to pay tribute to the work of so many of you here today, who are leading the healing in communities, building bridges between the old and new, and looking for ways to ensure families and communities are not just surviving, but thriving.

Particularly the Indigenous leaders who every day wear many hats, walk in both worlds, and yet give tirelessly for their families and their communities. You often carry a very heavy load, and we thank you.

Where western astronomers look up at the sky and look for the light, Yolngu astronomers look also deep into the dark, using the black space to uncover further information, to unravel further mysteries.

So while we are both looking at the night sky, we are often looking at different parts. And yet through mutual respect, sharing of knowledge and an openness to learning, together we can see and appreciate the whole sky.

Those same principles are guiding us toward Constitutional Recognition.

The final Referendum Council report was delivered, as you know, on the 30th of June. Bill Shorten and I were briefed by the Referendum Council two weeks ago. The report was a long time coming and I know some would like an instant fulfillment of its recommendations.

Let me say, I respect deeply the work of the Referendum Council and all of those who contributed to it, and I respect it by considering it very carefully and the Government is doing so, in the first instance with my colleagues, including Ken Wyatt the first Indigenous Australian to be a Federal Minister, and together we consider it with our Cabinet. That is our way, that is our process, that is how we give respect to serious recommendations on serious matters.

And I do look forward to working closely and in a bipartisan way with the Opposition as we have done to date.

Djapiri said Bill and I are in the same canoe and on this issue we certainly are - but we are not alone, we are not alone in the canoe. We are in the same canoe with all of you as well and we need to steer it wisely to achieve our goal, to achieve that goal of Makarrata. Thank you again Galarrwuy for that word.

We share a sense of the significance of words. I love words and language. There is a great definition. What is the difference between poetry and prose? The best definition of poetry that I have ever found is that which cannot be translated, it can only be felt.

The Referendum Council's report as Marcia reminded us is the fourth major report since that time and it adds immensely to the depth of knowledge. It gave us the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and I congratulate all those who attended on reaching an agreement. That was no small task.

It tells us that the priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is to resolve the powerlessness and lack of self-determination experienced - not by all, but certainly by too many.

I have been discussing it with leaders, the leaders of our First Australians and will continue to do so as we develop the next steps.

But there are still many questions:

What would the practical expression of the voice look like? What would the voice look like here for the Yolngu people? What would it look like for the people of Western Sydney, who are the largest population of Aboriginal peoples in Australia?

Is our highest aspiration to have Indigenous people outside the Parliament, providing advice to the Parliament? Or is it to have as many Indigenous voices, elected, within our Parliament?

What impact would the voice have on issues like child protection and justice, where the legislation and responsibility largely rest with state and territory governments?

These are important questions that require careful consideration. But the answers are not beyond us.

And I acknowledge that Indigenous Australians want deeper engagement with government and their fellow Australians, and to be much better consulted, and represented in the political, social and economic life of this nation.

We can't be weighed down by the past, but we can learn from it.

Australians are constitutionally conservative. The bar is surmountable, you can get over it but it is a high bar. That's why the Constitution has often been described as a frozen document.

Now many people talk about referendums, very few have experienced leading a campaign. The 1999 campaign for a Republic - believe me, now, one of the few subjects on which I have special knowledge - the 1999 campaign for a Republic has given me a very keen insight into what it will take to win, how hard it is to win, how much harder is the road for the advocate for change than that of those who resist change. I offer this experience today in the hope that together, we can achieve a different outcome to 1999. A successful referendum.

Compulsory voting has many benefits, but one negative aspect is that those who for one reason or another are not interested in an issue or familiar with it, are much more likely to vote no - it reinforces an already conservative constitutional context.

Another critical difference today is the rise of social media, which has changed the nature of media dramatically, in a decade or two we have a media environment which is no longer curated by editors and producers - but freewheeling, viral and unconstrained.

The question posed in a referendum must have minimal opposition and be clearly understood.

A vital ingredient of success is popular ownership. After all, the Constitution does not belong to the Government, or the Parliament, or the Judges. It belongs to the people.

It is Parliament's duty to propose changes to the Constitution but the Constitution cannot be changed by Parliament. Only the Australian people can do that.

No political deal, no cross party compromise, no leaders' handshake can deliver constitutional change.

Bipartisanship is a necessary but far from a sufficient condition of successful constitutional reform.

To date, again as Marcia described much of the discussion has been about removing the racially discriminatory provisions in the Constitution and recognising our First Australians in our nation's founding document.

However, the Referendum Council has told us that a voice to Parliament is the only option they advise us to put to the Australian people. We have heard this, and we will work with you to find a way forward.

Though not a new concept, the voice is relatively new to the national conversation about constitutional change.

To win, we must all work together to build a high level of interest and familiarity with the concept of a voice, and how this would be different, or the same, as iterations of the past like the National Aboriginal Conference or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

We also need to look to the experience of other countries, as we seek to develop the best model for Australia.

The historic 1967 Referendum was the most successful in our history because of its simplicity and clarity. The injustices were clearly laid out - Indigenous people were not enjoying the rights and freedoms of other citizens. The question was clearly understood - that the Commonwealth needed to have powers to make laws for Indigenous Australians. And the answer seemed obvious - vote yes to ensure the Commonwealth gave Indigenous people equal rights.

To succeed this time around, we need to develop enough detail so that the problem, the solution and therefore the question at the ballot box are simple, easily understood and overwhelmingly embraced.

One of the toughest lessons I learnt from the Referendum campaign of '99 was that an 'all or nothing' approach sometimes results in nothing. During the campaign, those who disagreed with the model that was proposed urged a "no" vote, arguing that we could all vote for a different Republic model in a few years. I warned that a "no" vote meant no republic for a very long time.

Now, regrettably, my prediction 18 years ago was correct. We must avoid a rejection at a referendum if we want to avoid setting Makarrata reconciliation back.

We recognise that the Uluru statement is powerful because it comes from an Indigenous-designed and led process. And because it comes from the heart, we must accept that it is grounded in wisdom and truth.

It is both a lament and a yearning. It is poetry.

The challenge now is to turn this poetry that speaks so eloquently of your aspiration into prose that will enable its realisation and be embraced by all Australians.

This is hard and complex work. And we need to take care of each other as we continue on this journey. We need to take care of each other in the canoe, lest we tip out of it.

Yesterday afternoon was a powerful show of humanity. As we stood together holding hands - Indigenous and non-Indigenous people - we stood together as Australians. As equals.

And we will have the best chance of success by working together. This cannot be a take it or leave it proposal. We have to come to the table and negotiate in good faith, and I am committed to working with you to find a way forward.

Galarrwuy - you gave us your fire words yesterday, thank you again. We will draw on them as we look to light the path forward for our nation.

And when considering how to do that, we are inspired by the success of the Uluru process. The statement that emerged from Uluru was designed and led by Indigenous Australians and the next steps should be too.

To go to a referendum there must be an understanding between all parties that the proposal will meet the expectations of the very people it claims it will represent.

Now we have five Aboriginal members of our Parliament. They will be vital in shaping and shepherding any legislation through the Parliament. They too are bridge builders, walking in both worlds, and their contribution to the Parliament enriches us all.

The Australian Parliament and the nation's people - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - must be engaged as we work together to find the maximum possible overlap between what Indigenous people are seeking, what the Australian community overall will embrace and what the Parliament will authorise.

I have been learning that the word Makarrata means the 'coming together after a struggle' — Galarrwuy told us a beautiful story this morning about a Makarrata here in this country. And a Makarrata is seen as necessary, naturally, if we are to continue our path to reconciliation.

But just like the night sky, reconciliation means different things to different people. This complexity convinces me that our nation cannot be reconciled in one step, in one great leap. We will only be reconciled when we take a number of actions, both practical and symbolic.

Beyond Constitutional Recognition, that work continues every day. I reflect on the Makarrata discussion of the late 70's and 80's. A list of demands was sent to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in 1981. It called for rights to land and resources, compensation, the creation of Aboriginal schools, medical centres and an Aboriginal bank.

Despite a final agreement not being reached at the time, we have achieved some of the policies called for. The Commonwealth provided \$433 million to 137 Aboriginal Medical Services across the country last financial year. Indigenous Business Australia provides low interest loans to help Indigenous Australians secure economic opportunities including home ownership with 544 new housing loans made last year. The Aboriginal Benefits Account supports Northern Territory Land Councils and provides grants for the benefit of Aboriginal people living in the Territory.

We now spend \$4.9 billion on the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

And we are empowering communities through our Indigenous Procurement policy.

I am pleased to announce today the Commonwealth has officially surpassed half a billion dollars in spending with Indigenous businesses all over Australia. I am looking forward to sharing the full two-year results in October. This is a spectacular increase from just \$6.2 million being won by Indigenous businesses only a few years ago under former policies.

Since 2008 the Commonwealth has been helping improve remote housing and bring down rates of overcrowding, with \$5.4 billion to build thousands of better homes over ten years.

And the land is returning to its traditional owners.

More than 2.5 million square kilometres of land, or about 34 per cent of Australia's land mass is today recognised under Native Title. Another 24 per cent is covered by registered claims and by 2025, our ambition is to finalise all current Native Title claims.

So we are standing here on Aboriginal land – land that has been rightfully acknowledged as yours and returned to you. And we are standing here near the birthplace of the land rights movement. A movement of which the Yolngu people were at the forefront.

As a nation we've come a long way.

In the Northern Territory, more than 50 per cent of the land is now Aboriginal land, recognised as Aboriginal land.

Just like the land at Kenbi which, on behalf of our nation, I returned to the traditional owners, the Larrakia people last year.

Earlier this year I appointed June Oscar AO, who has been acknowledged earlier, as the first female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, who has agreed to report on the issues affecting Indigenous women and girls' success and safety.

And all of that work contributes to a better future for our First Australians.

But there is much more to be done in not just what we do, but how we do it - as we work with our First Australians. We are doing things with our First Australians, not to them.

Now Galarrwuy - I have read and read again your essay Rom Watungu. It too is a story from the heart, of your father, of his life and when his time came, how he handed his authority to you, the embodiment of continuity, the bearer of a name that means "the rock that stands against time"

But rocks that stand against time, ancient cultures and lore, these are the strong foundations on which new achievements are built, from which new horizons can be seen - the tallest towers are built on the oldest rocks.

You, Galarrwuy, ask Australians to let Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders breathe and be free, be who you are and ask that we see your songs and languages, the land and the ceremonies as a gift.

As Prime Minister I will continue to do all I can to ensure that being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian means to be successful, to achieve, to have big dreams and high hopes, and to draw strength from your identity as an Indigenous person in this great country.

That's why, as we renegotiate the Closing the Gap targets with the various state and territory jurisdictions later this year, my Government has insisted on a strengths based approach. Indigenous people are not a problem to be solved. You are our fellow Australians. Your cultures are a gift to our nation.

There's so much more work to be done.

But in doing so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and all Australians, continue to connect with pride and optimism - with mabu liyan, in Pat's language from the Yawuru people - the wellbeing that comes with a reconciled harmony with you, our First Australians, our shared history truthfully told and a deeper understanding of the most ancient human cultures on earth, and the First Australians to whom we have so much to thank for sharing them with us.

Thank you so much.

[ENDS]