

QER Fuel for Thought

QER Fuel for Thought – 2020-10

Towards Reconciliation: Seeing through Others' Eyes

Imagine a stranger comes to your door. "Good evening" he says. "I'm from the government. We are going to be resuming your home for important government purposes. Fortunately, we will provide you with alternative accommodation in another town. We hope you enjoy your new home". The next day, you ring up the government office to protest the decision, only to be told their records show that no one had been living at your house, and therefore nothing can be done. Obviously you would be justifiably outraged.

In some ways, this is how many indigenous people say they feel. European settlement of Australia was based on a declaration of "terra nullius" or "land of no one". This declaration was made because it was against English law to occupy territory unless the land was uninhabited. That set the tone for engagement between the settlers and Australia's indigenous people for the next two centuries.

While there were some settlers who recognized and appreciated the unique culture and languages of the indigenous inhabitants, many treated aboriginal people as invisible or as an inconvenience. Occupation of the land was often accompanied by systematic violence. Even in much more recent times, government policy led to aboriginal people being forcibly relocated from their homes and cut off from their traditional cultural practices and language.

It is uncomfortable for most of us to think about such acts being committed in a country where we pride ourselves on giving everyone a fair go.

But as Prime Minister Paul Keating said in 1992:

"...there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition of historical truth, or the extension of social justice, or the deepening of Australian social democracy to include indigenous Australians. There is everything to gain".

Most of us genuinely do believe that the Australian way is to give everyone a fair go. To build and maintain a genuine relationship with anyone, it is necessary to see the



Nigel Clements
Site Superintendent,
QER Gladstone.

world through their eyes. As Keating reflected about the dispossession and injustices against aboriginal people:

"With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask - how would I feel if this were done to me?"

I know that reconciliation is complex and none of us have all the answers. In my view, reconciliation begins with our hearts and minds and can only be completed by our actions.

In this Reconciliation Week, all of us at QER pay our respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we work: the Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng and Taribelang Bunda peoples, and their elders. We recognise the injustices of the past and we look forward to a future where those injustices are made right in a truly reconciled Australia. We are in this together.