



# VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICE CO-OPERATIVE LTD.

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The Editor,  
"The Age"  
Spencer Street,  
Melbourne Vic

Dear Sir,

In the financial year about to the end, about \$1,000 million will have been spent by the Federal and State Governments on Aboriginal Affairs. In the past twenty years the total amount spent would be between \$5,000 - 8,000 million.

Last year the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody clearly showed that for the vast majority of ordinary Koori people the extensive social, economic and political deprivation continues unabated. And, as one at the "coal face" of Koori affairs for twenty five years I can assure people that the situation is actually getting worse!

So when are Australians going to wake up?

How is it that despite overwhelming conclusive evidence that past and present Government policies have failed, and continue to fail, the Australian people and their supposedly intelligent political and media watchdogs continue to be deluded into believing that all is fine.

For twenty years Australian people and media have been assured by governments that policies toward Kooris were "appropriate, effective and in the interests of Aboriginal people".

The Royal Commission Report and a mountain of other currently available evidence dramatically expose the past deception and duplicity of governments of all political colours in their dealings with Koori peoples. The evidence also clearly shows that governments continue to lie to the Australian people about the situations and policies of the present day.

And yet the Canberra press gallery, rather than being the fearless analysts and critics of government policy, when it comes to Koori affairs become timid and compliant publicists for government policy, and in doing so do a great disservice to the community who are lulled into complacency and apathy.

A good example of reporters selling government policies is one Margaret Easterbrooke of the "Age" Canberra bureau. More often than not her reports on Koori affairs seem to parrot Ministerial press releases and give extensive space to gov't "approved" Koori spokespersons.

To wit, last week in a report from Canberra about the 25th anniversary of the historic 1967 referendum. Ms Easterbrooke quoted at length several people; the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, a high profile white Melbourne lawyer, and an Aboriginal woman who is the Chairperson of the latest Gov't instrumentality imposed on Koori people, ATSIC. Furthermore

the Koori Chairperson of ATSIC is the only Koori on ATSIC who was not voted there by Koori people, rather being Ministerially appointed. Thus an article about an important political battle in Koori history cited not one person who could put a Koori community perspective. This is somewhat akin to writing a story about the Coral Sea Battle presenting the Japanese perspective with only Japanese or Japanese approved spokespersons.

The resultant article from Ms Easterbrooke misinformed the Australian public in the same way as thousands of similar articles have helped Australians justify their callous complacency and indifference to Aboriginal suffering since the momentary aberration of the 1967 referendum.

WAKE UP AUSTRALIA! Start asking questions. It is in both our community's interests to ask, "Where has the money gone, and more importantly, Where is it going today?"

Despite what Ms Easterbrooke would have you believe, the most needy in Koori Australia are not the ones who benefit from present State and Federal policies and spending on Aboriginal Affairs. It is up to you to ask who does!

Yours Sincerely

GARY FOLEY  
(Member, Board of Directors, V.A.H.S.)